A Mirror in the Dark

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/10728969.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Jack Crawford, Beverly Katz, Alana Bloom, Abigail Hobbs, Original Characters, Freddie Lounds
Additional Tags:	Dom Hannibal, show typical violence, Hannibal is Hannibal, Shibari, Masochist Will Graham, Dark Will Graham, original serial killer, very dark very sexy very angsty, bad end part one but a good murderhusbands end part two, Mentlaly Ill Will Graham, Sub Will, NOTHING IS SAFE OR SANE, Explicit and Filthy Hot Sexual Content, season 1 AU, Kink, BDSM, D/s, noncon fantasies as subject matter, dark fantasies, Consensual Non-Consent
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of Mirrors
Collections:	my favourite hannigram fics, Hannibal Rereads, Read_this_next
Stats:	Published: 2017-04-25 Completed: 2017-09-12 Words: 166,887 Chapters: 25/25

A Mirror in the Dark

by wormsin

Summary

"It's understandable for you to empathize with the victim as well, when you step in the mind of a killer," Hannibal said. "Fear, pain, violation, and death. Repeating the fantasy in the safety of your head so that you can regain control over the experience."

"My head doesn't feel very safe," Will muttered.

Hannibal inclined his head. "The methods we use to protect ourselves from monsters can become monstrous in their own right. Your mind seeks to protect you when you are overwhelmed, and maybe you see yourself as a victim in order to prevent yourself from actually becoming one."

"Or to prevent myself from becoming the killer."

"The two become one. If you destroy yourself, you cannot hurt others, and similarly, no one can hurt you."

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Will Graham is having disturbing fantasies about being the victim of horrific crimes. Hannibal wants to help him realize his desires.

Notes

If Will is a mirror, then who is looking into him?

--

now in Russian! thank you so much @SweetTeaTime for the translation.

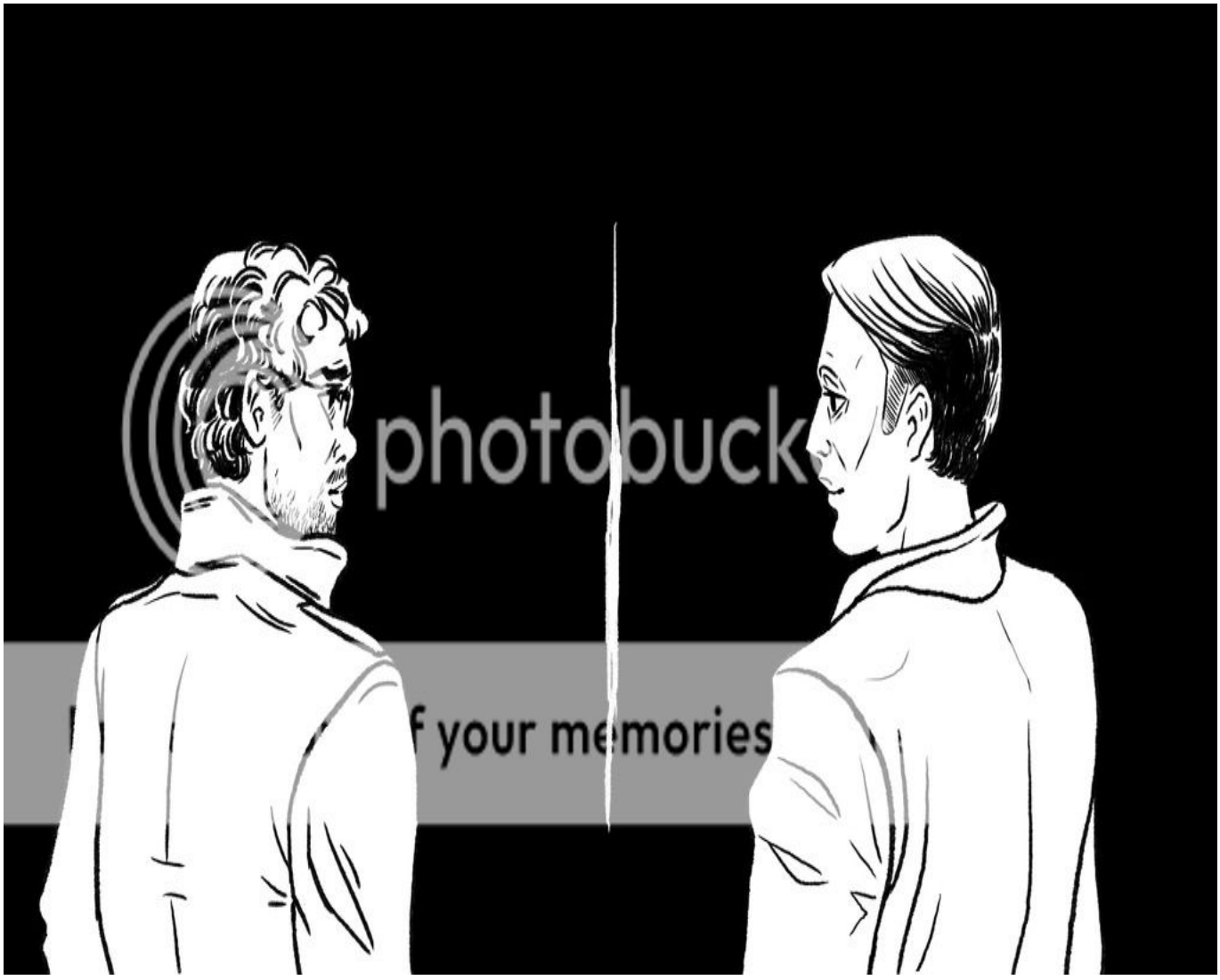
The Mirror

Chapter Notes

welcome to the first fic in the mirrors series. thanks for reading. it's going to be a dark phantasmagoria with sex and angst but take my hand and i will walk you into hell and back out of it.

this fic takes fantasies of violence, murder, dying, and noncon as subject matter (among other things). actual sexual assault in the universe of fic is never treated as sexy, is not on screen pt 1, does not happen to characters, is not described in detail, and is on the sidelines of the case. I try to treat it like the show does. u can message me if you feel that you need further clarification. content warnings are in the chapters.

say hi on tumblr



More often than not, when Will looked at his hands he saw them bloody. Less tangible than hallucinations, the obsessive visuals flickered in the corners of his eyes, appearing only briefly. He preferred the imaginings where his hands were covered in blood to the ones where his wrists were raw from restraints, or his nails broken.

"What do you see in them?" Hannibal asked.

Will took his eyes from his hands and acknowledged the reality around him: Hannibal's huge office, the rain against the window, their familiar seating arrangement. "Possibility," he replied. "Reflections."

"You see yourself in the people you study."

"I'm supposed to just see them."

"But you don't," Hannibal said with a level stare. "Do you feel as if you are looking in a mirror?"

Will's throat was dry. "I feel like I am a mirror." He fidgeted with his hands, touching each finger together one by one.

"A neutral surface that others might see clearly in," Hannibal mused. "In that scenario, your gaze is irrelevant, nonexistent."

"I'm aware that I'm not perfectly unbiased when it comes to my job," Will replied tightly.

"Nor is the mirror," Hannibal said. "When we gaze upon it, we bring our own desires and fears. If you are a mirror, who is looking upon you?"

Will smiled, a twisted thing. "I'm used to people looking for answers in me. They don't usually like what they find."

He was aware of Hannibal's gaze on him, but didn't meet his eyes. By now he was more used to making eye contact with him; it was less distracting than looking at others. Hannibal was neutral. Briefly, Will saw an infinite hallway made from two mirrors facing each other, curving into darkness.

"What possibilities do you find?" Hannibal inquired.

Will closed his eyes and tipped his head back on the chair. "It's not usually like this. I don't fixate. I process useful information and then file it away. But now I can't stop imagining." He pressed his hands over his face, blocking the light from his eyes, hard enough against his eyelids to spark blotchy colors.

"What do you imagine, Will?"

He laughed bitterly. "We've already talked about my current case."

"I was asking after specifics."

Hannibal was always patient. In conversations, he seemed to be there waiting when Will arrived, one step ahead or at least keeping pace. Will felt heat creep up his neck. All it took was a few words for his brain to replay the scene: thick cords wrapped around his body, tight enough so his

skin was about to break like clay before wire; puffy red welts raising on the skin; his own hands pulling his cats cradle tighter, tighter. Will clenched his teeth.

"What do you see?" Hannibal asked for the second time that session.

Will shifted uncomfortably in his seat. He could feel the wires on his skin, and he wrapped his arms around himself. "I'd rather not discuss it," he bit.

"But you will."

Hannibal's voice was calm, speaking with a confidence that jolted Will, made his eyes snap open. "What? I don't-"

"If it becomes uncomfortable, you may stop."

"It's already uncomfortable," Will said, instead of *are you ordering me?*

"You may find talking about it lessens your discomfort."

"I doubt it," Will replied, but took a deep breath, passing his hands over his chest briefly to chase away the ghost bindings there. "I'm the victim. I can feel the wires wrapped around me, cutting me, sectioning me off. Gravity will do the work of severing me to pieces. I wrap them around myself, I pull them tighter."

"Both killer and victim."

"It's all tangled."

"Lingering long after you've left the scene."

"Yes."

"What about the case has you seeing this double image?"

Will leaned forward on his knees, looking at Hannibal directly. Still pools of water. "That's the thing. I don't think it's the case. I can separate victim and killer easily, at the scene I barely felt like prey."

"But now, something else mars the image."

"Ripples in the water."

The corners of Hannibal's mouth turned in a slight smile. "Tell me Will, do you often victimize yourself in your sexual fantasies?"

"Jesus, Hannibal." Will tore his gaze away, gnawing at his bottom lip. Leaping from corpse to sexual fantasy was not doing his hyperactive mind any favors. They hadn't talked much about Will's sex life (not that there was currently anything to talk about). Will had made it obvious that intimacy of any kind was not on his radar. Yet Hannibal had made several leaps to find exactly the thing Will was trying to avoid thinking about.

"It is quite a common fantasy," Hannibal said, as if to assuage, and Will laughed.

"I know exactly how common it is, within women and men."

"You don't like being called common."

"Not particularly."

"It feels abnormal to you," Hannibal observed.

Will shivered, still chewing on the inside of his mouth. "There are a number of things I don't indulge in."

"Desires beset us," Hannibal replied smoothly. "Some pleasures we allow ourselves, and the ones we don't allow can twist and become insistent, finding other ways out."

Will laughed, rubbing a hand on his jaw. "So if I wasn't sexually repressed I wouldn't be fantasizing about being strung up in death?"

Hannibal's eyes narrowed, and there was some amusement in his voice. "You know that's not what I mean."

"No. Too Freudian." He couldn't help but be amused at the noise of displeasure Hannibal made. "You mean that there's a reason that I'm fixating on the victim now, the same reason I have fantasies where..." He couldn't bring himself to say it.

"It's understandable for you to emphasize with the victim as well, when you step in the mind of a killer," Hannibal said. "Fear, pain, violation, and death. Repeating the fantasy in the safety of your head so that you can regain control over the experience."

"My head doesn't feel very safe," Will muttered.

Hannibal inclined his head. "The methods we use to protect ourselves from monsters can become monstrous in their own right. Your mind seeks to protect you when you are overwhelmed, and maybe you see yourself as a victim in order to prevent yourself from actually becoming one."

"Or to prevent myself from becoming the killer."

"The two become one. If you destroy yourself, you cannot hurt others, and similarly, no one can hurt you."

Will let out a shaky breath, the words ringing too true. He ducked his head, staring briefly at his hands: free of blood and phantom wounds, just shaking. He raised his eyes to Hannibal, finding his unwavering gaze deep in the shelter of his brow. He always was so steady, his face composed, whereas Will frayed at the seams, facial tics and shuddering words, never able to hold gaze with others.

Hannibal inclined his head, and Will had the sensation of looking deeper. Light and shadow flickered on the edge of his vision, pulling at him to look away, but he resisted.

"I'd rather fantasize about being the killer," Will admitted, the words like poison. "And then I feel like I should feel guilty for that."

"Instead, you feel guilty for the part of you that wants to be the victim." Hannibal leaned forward, his voice soft and gentle. "Why do you recoil with shame, when you have described for me before

scenes of horror and ruin at the hands of killers you understand too well? You anticipate judgement when you describe yourself as their prey."

Will's eyes faltered, and for a moment he looked at Hannibal's mouth, before raising his gaze again. "I don't... I don't know what I anticipate."

Hannibal pressed his lips together, a low hum in his throat. "I don't wish to make you too uncomfortable, but may I enquirer further into your fantasies?"

"Now you're asking?" Will chuckled, and leaned back in his chair. Despite his shame, he found that he wanted Hannibal to see this part of him. "Why not?"

Hannibal straightened, and smoothed the front of his suit jacket. "This killer displayed his victim in a web of metal wires. Does the idea of being bound and restrained appeal to you?"

Will scoffed. "I don't think restraints and I go well together."

"Your mind immediately jumps to your fear of institutionalizations. Not caged indefinitely. Tied up, wrapped securely, unable to move."

Will worked his mouth. He could feel the coils on his skin, cutting in, his flesh raised on either side. "It so happens that I've tried handcuffs, ties." He shook his head. "No appeal. They're like a hollow imitation of the real thing. Felt like such a performance."

"And the real thing, what you saw today? Forced like your body was an object to be molded to another's vision?"

Will flinched, and brought his arms close to his chest. His skin felt hot and sensitive as he imagined the wires cutting into him. "I just want to give up sometimes," he said through gritted teeth. "Finally be done with everything. Utterly destroyed."

"Relinquish control."

"Now that is a fantasy." Will crossed his arms tightly, curling in on himself. "I could never fully lose control."

"Perhaps in the right circumstances," Hannibal said. "You are tired of struggling to hold yourself together, afraid what might happen if you don't fight the waves threatening to take you under. It might do you good to be able to let go of control in a safe environment."

Will furrowed his brow. "Are you recommending bondage as therapy?" he asked, incredulously.

Hannibal was utterly unfazed. "It needn't be as literal as bondage, and it would be inappropriate for me to suggest an exchange of power as therapy."

Will laughed. "Just suggesting it might be therapeutic. This is becoming uncomfortable -- not the conversation, just--" He shook his head, clenched his body. "I'm having... sensations. When I think about being tied up with steel wire."

"Do you feel pain?"

Will shrugged. "Sort of. A reflection of pain. It's agitating."

"Perhaps we should find a distraction then." Hannibal stood, and adjusted his cuffs. "Shall we take a walk?"

"Sure."

It was a windy night, and Will shoved his hands deep in the pocket of his coat to keep them from freezing. But the cold calmed him, and chased away the sensations brought on by his obsessive thoughts. They walked in silence for some time until Will relaxed. He took deep breaths of the night air.

"Better?" Hannibal inquired.

"Yes," Will breathed. "Am I keeping you? My time must be up by now."

Hannibal shook his head. "Do not think of it. There is nowhere I would rather be."

Will snorted. "I highly doubt that."

"Is it so surprising that I enjoy your company?"

Will glanced at him. He knew Hannibal wasn't lying but was surely exaggerating for some reason. "Most people don't," he replied.

"We are not most people," Hannibal countered. "I can assure you there is no one else who I would rather spend time with."

Will felt heat rise in his face. He licked his lips. Hannibal had left out 'right now'; was his preference for Will indefinite? Or, like so many others, was he elevating Will as a curiosity to be discarded once Will overstayed his welcome? "Do you consider us friends?" Will asked.

"I certainly hope we will be," Hannibal said. "I consider you my friend."

"Not exactly professional."

"You are not technically my patient."

"So you can report back to Jack."

"That is his wish. I am far more interested in helping you survive what Jack puts you through."

"Using me as his mirror," Will muttered.

"Indeed."

Will suddenly had a thought. "Does the BAU pay you for our sessions?"

"No. They tried and I refused."

Will stopped, and Hannibal did as well. "This entire time?" he said, incredulous. "Did I satiate your curiosity enough to compensate for our sessions?"

Hannibal's face was unreadable. When he spoke, his voice was low. "You are the most interesting person I have met in a long time."

Will flushed again, mouth twisting around a laugh. "You--" But Hannibal held up a gentle hand, and Will bit his tongue.

"Please, Will," Hannibal said. "My interest is not purely professional. I have never pretended that our time together is impersonal. I find immense value in our conversations, and pleasure in your company."

Will furrowed his brows. He could feel his face betraying him: suspicion, discomfort, and a strange desire. "What do you see in the mirror?" he asked, his voice shaking.

Hannibal's eyes bore into him, no longer neutral, but glinting with intent and desire. "I see something I wish to polish to perfection."

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The feathered stag stood in front of Will in the mist like a beacon. It stomped at the ground, nostrils flaring as it snorted, preparing to charge. Will's heart was caught in his throat. He saw himself impaled on its antlers like Cassie Boyle, pierced through, mounted for display on the wall of Hannibal's office. Fear and desire welled up as blood around antlers. The stag stomped the ground again, ducked its head, and charged.

Will ran.

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The police dropped Will back at his house. He had been sleepwalking. The dogs whined at the door for him, sensing something was wrong. He went straight to the kitchen and splashed cold water on his face. Sleepwalking. Running like in his dream, in part, if his scraped knees were any indication. He woke up kneeling, if he even was awake.

Shivering from the cold, he threw on some clothes, and fed the dogs, his mind elsewhere. It was barely 6:00 in the morning. He got in the car, and drove towards Baltimore.

It was only when he was outside Hannibal's door that he questioned what he was doing. He could have called first. Waited for a more sane hour to drop by. Hannibal had invited him to his home before, but now he wasn't entirely sure that he was welcome.

Will was still shaking when he rang the doorbell.

Hannibal greeted him in a black and white robe, looking sleepy but more put together than Will ever was in the morning. His eyes widened, and he smiled as he said, "Will. Welcome. To what do I owe this visit?"

Will shoved his hands in his pants pockets and looked away. "It's early, I shouldn't have come." But Hannibal was holding the door open for him, and he walked inside.

"I'll make coffee," Hannibal said, leading Will to the kitchen. Will watched him work the espresso machine, the precise movements of his hands captivating him.

"The police found me this morning," he said, jaw clenched. "Sleepwalking. About a mile from my house."

Hannibal paused to look at Will. "Have you ever sleepwalked before?"

"Never," Will hissed. His legs were shaking.

"Sit down," Hannibal said, moving to guide Will into a chair, hand on his back. Will didn't mind the touch.

He let out a shuddering breath. Hannibal was close, looking at him with some concern. "My legs," Will muttered. "Scraped them up pretty bad. I was running in my dream."

Hannibal knelt before him, hand resting at the cuff of his pants. "May I?"

Will nodded, and watched as Hannibal rolled up his pants carefully to expose the shallow wound. "Hmmm." A slight frown marred his expression. "I need you to remove your trousers. Is that alright?"

Will flushed slightly. "Uh. Sure -- is it bad?"

"There's some gravel to remove."

Will cursed under his breath and flushed harder. It was stupid to come here before taking care of his wounds himself. Hannibal stood and went to a cabinet, and Will quickly undid his pants. He sat back down in his grey boxers and looked down at his legs. The scrapes were worse than he originally thought, and a bruise was beginning to color on his right knee.

"What were you running from?" Hannibal walked back to him with a first aid kit in hand, and knelt again.

"The nightmare," Will replied, not wanting to give the stag a name. He shifted in his seat. Hannibal didn't bother to tell him it would sting before beginning to clean his wounds. As in everything, Hannibal's movements were precise and graceful. Will's neck grow hot as he watched Hannibal clean and bandage him, his large hand resting for a moment on the bone of Will's ankle. Seeing him hurt. Taking care of him. When Hannibal raised his eyes, Will had to glance away.

"You wanted me to tend to your wounds," Hannibal observed, and Will's breath caught in his throat.

"I don't -- I wasn't thinking this morning, I'm sorry."

"Nothing to apologize for. I'm happy to offer my assistance."

"It's ridiculous."

"It is striking that you drove to my house before dealing with an injury. I'm flattered." Hannibal finished applying the bandages, and looked up at Will. "Did you merely wish for me to address your injuries, or did you also want me to see you injured?"

"Hannibal," Will warned, rubbing his hand over his mouth. Did he sound excited? Images flashed in his mind, stumbling to Hannibal's doorstep bloody and beaten, falling before his feet, helpless, exposed. "I wasn't thinking," he said again, feeling acutely Hannibal's hand on his ankle. "Is the sleepwalking due to stress, too?"

Noting the change of subject, Hannibal stood, and resumed his station at the espresso machine. "It's possible," he replied. "Sleepwalking can be an outlet for repressed feelings: anger, fear, desire."

Will pulled up his pants quickly. "Again with the repression."

"You were being chased in your dream. Anything else?"

Will swallowed. He accepted his cup of coffee from Hannibal before answering. "I was impaled," he said, nearly breathless. "On the head of a stag." He took a hasty sip of coffee.

Hannibal made his own cup of espresso. "Your mind is telling you something in the twilight of your consciousness: dreams, intrusive thoughts. Will you listen to them or cast them aside?"

The coffee was helping. He felt more awake now, and the shaking had subsided. "I don't have much of a choice," he said.

"Perhaps I should say 'integrate' instead of 'listen'," Hannibal clarified. "Consider what these disturbances are showing you, and address it in the light of day."

Will closed his eyes. "I don't know what I want."

“Can I suggest breakfast?”

Will watched Hannibal prepare their food in silence, rattled mind easing somewhat with the caffeine and precise movements of Hannibal’s cooking. He let Will watch him without comment or returned gaze as he poached eggs and fried thick strips of bacon. They ate in the dining room, and Will left for Quantico feeling more alive than he had in days.

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Hannibal held the door open for Will, welcoming him into his office with a smile, noting the direct eye contact, the purpose with which he moved to the chair immediately. No wandering around the subject, then. Hannibal arranged himself opposite Will. “How are you, Will?”

Will pulled his lips into a smile, eyes narrow. “I’ve been indulging,” he answered, a hint of humor in his voice, but not the usual self-deprecating and bitter amusement. He locked eyes with Hannibal, allowing him to see and be seen. “Allowing myself to fantasize,” Will continued, “and not just shoving away the thoughts I don’t allow myself.”

“I’m very glad to hear that,” Hannibal replied. “I would be grateful to hear about your fantasies.”

Will sneered, lips twitching. Oh, how Hannibal loved watching his face: the shuddering expressions, unsteady movements, struggle to compose himself, the way his mouth gave away

everything before he even said it. He wanted Hannibal to know of his disturbing desires, most likely testing him. When Will spoke, his words were like poetry.

“I’ve been fantasizing about the Chesapeake Ripper,” Will said venomously. “I fantasize about being captured by him. He does terrible things to me. But he doesn’t kill me, doesn’t humiliate me the way he does with the others. He wants me to understand. He rewards me for understanding by making me something beautiful.”

Hannibal kept his breathing steady, though his blood pumped with excitement. It was a small effort to keep himself composed.

"In some of my fantasies..." Will licked his lips, paused for just a moment. "They're -- you're in them."

Hannibal's lips parted, and he allowed himself to show some of the fascination and pleasure he felt. That Will associated Hannibal with the Ripper, however tangentially, sent a thrill down his spine. Hannibal nodded his head, allowing Will to go on.

Will exhaled slowly. "Sometimes I arrive at your doorstep bloody and traumatized, utterly undone. You see me dying and maimed, you see what I've been through. And... and I think about how the Ripper would leave me for you to find, tied down to your dinning room table."

"A gift," Hannibal breathed.

"The room has been sterilized," Will continued, lips shining and jaw trembling, aroused in some capacity by his own violent fantasy. "The Ripper has already cut me open, exposing my chest cavity. The surgical tools have been cleaned for you. You loom over me to see if I'm still alive, I am; if he's taken anything, he hasn't. But he's left something for you. A thin metal rod, tangled in my organs. Or a shard of glass. A fishing hook. Nothing has been pierced yet."

"I must perform surgery on you to save you," Hannibal said in a low voice. "But there is great possibility of me killing you if I try."

Will relaxed in the chair, eyes nearly fluttering shut, but he managed to keep looking at Hannibal. "I'm conscious. I haven't been sedated. I feel everything. You put your hands inside me."

"Do I succeed?" Hannibal asked, trying to relax hands that want to clench the arms of his chair. He could smell the desire on Will mingled with fear like apples rotting in the rain. "Or do you die by my hands?"

Will ran his hand through his hair, eyes flickering away but always back to Hannibal. "I don't know. I don't get to the end of the fantasy. If you save me, it's prolonged, painful, I can't be cured. I don't want it to end, so I don't die, but I think about you failing to save me."

There was a gentle flush to Will's cheeks. Hannibal wanted to cross the short distance between them and cradle his skull in both hands, feel that flush under his fingers. Will looked so delicate and vulnerable. He wanted Hannibal to see him as such. Predatory instincts rose to the surface, and Hannibal considered for a moment what it would be like to reveal them to Will, to bear his teeth to Will's purposefully exposed throat. He passed a hand over his eyes, closing them in a display of regaining control.

"Will," he said, a small plea.

"Am I making you uncomfortable?"

"No," Hannibal said immediately, and met Will's eyes again. It took him a moment before he could respond in full. "I find strange comfort in your fantasy. I am trying to compose myself so that I might be more useful to you in dissecting it."

Will grinned and tilted his head to the side. "Not like you to make puns."

If only you knew, Hannibal thought. "The visuals are poignant."

"Are they affecting you?" Will asked, clearly seeing that they did.

"Deeply," Hannibal admitted. "The idea of there being no barriers between us, not even your skin, has appeal. You allowing yourself to be completely vulnerable with me."

"You see how broken I am. How much this hurts me."

Hannibal took a deep breath. Not quite masochism, he thought, but time would tell if pain elicited a positive or sexual response. "I want to see. Can you show me?"

Will struggled to respond, his confidence collapsing into a myriad of uncertain expressions. His eyes fell, then lifted only to Hannibal's mouth. "I'm trying," he said with a note of desperation. "Isn't that what –- isn't --" He ducked his head but couldn't conceal the flush of shame. "God, I'm not the victim, not like this, I'm not--"

"Weak?" Hannibal offered. "Certainly not."

Will made a noise of discomfort, and hid his face behind a hand. Hannibal relaxed finally. Will hadn't shocked Hannibal with his fantasy, and faced with the prospect of his desires being accepted, he retreated to shame. Hannibal saw the path before him and nearly purred with satisfaction.

"Look at me Will," he said in a voice that would tolerate no refusal. Will's jaw clenched, his eyes rose to meet Hannibal's and see him sitting in perfect ease. "You desire to be the victim to allay your fear that you are no different than Garret Jacob Hobbs or the Ripper. In the safety of your fantasies, Will-as-killer and Will-as-victim dance to create a careful balance, relinquishing control in a controlled environment, whether to rend flesh or be absolutely dominated."

Will shuddered, throat clamping down on a moan.

Hannibal did not hide the pleasure in his eyes. "Neither of us would find these fantasies particularly disturbing or uncommon coming from another; but your proximity to real violent killers and their victim's makes the veil of fantasy seem thin. I imagine the details of your vivid imagination are what concern you. Did the Ripper decorate your intestines with fishing flies of your own making? Have you while waking wrapped fishing line around your finger so tight it cuts?"

"Hannibal," Will pleaded, teeth chattering.

"I want to give you what you desire," Hannibal said and watched Will's eyes grow wide. "My personal feelings for you make it inappropriate to deal with your fantasies as your therapist. I'm afraid that I can't be objective when it comes to this."

Will shut his eyes, and Hannibal wanted to peel the lids away and burry himself in what Will saw. "You--" The painful struggle on Will's face was exquisite. "What... what would you do?"

"Tying you down to my dining room table seems a good place to start."

Will put his head in his hands. "This is insane."

"Not at all," Hannibal replied. "Did I say you could look away from me?"

Shocked, Will raised his head. "What -- Hannibal -- you can't be serious."

"You know that I am."

"I've never... done anything like that."

Hannibal regarded him, pleased that Will met his gaze despite his impulse to retreat. "I only have some experience. We wouldn't do anything you didn't desire."

"Would... would it be sexual?"

"If that's what you want."

"What do you want?"

Hannibal stared at him. "Right now, I want to touch you."

"God, I would let you."

Hannibal smiled. "I know. I imagine that when I have you secured to my table, you would let me do whatever I pleased with you."

Will swallowed. Watched Hannibal in his chair, waiting for him to move, to take what he wanted. "It's not like you to deny yourself something that you want," Will muttered.

The desire coming from Will was palpable. Hannibal shook his head. "Not here, not yet. You'll come to my house tomorrow night for dinner. Take the time to think about what you want from me. I will take care of the rest."

It would be a shame not to give Will a reward for his beautiful behavior. At the door on his way out, Hannibal cupped Will's cheek, fingers firm on his jaw, and leaned in to smell him: fear, arousal, his cheap aftershave, and beneath it all the sweet smell of fever. Hannibal smiled, his eyes dark. "Until tomorrow, Will."

Obsidian

Chapter Summary

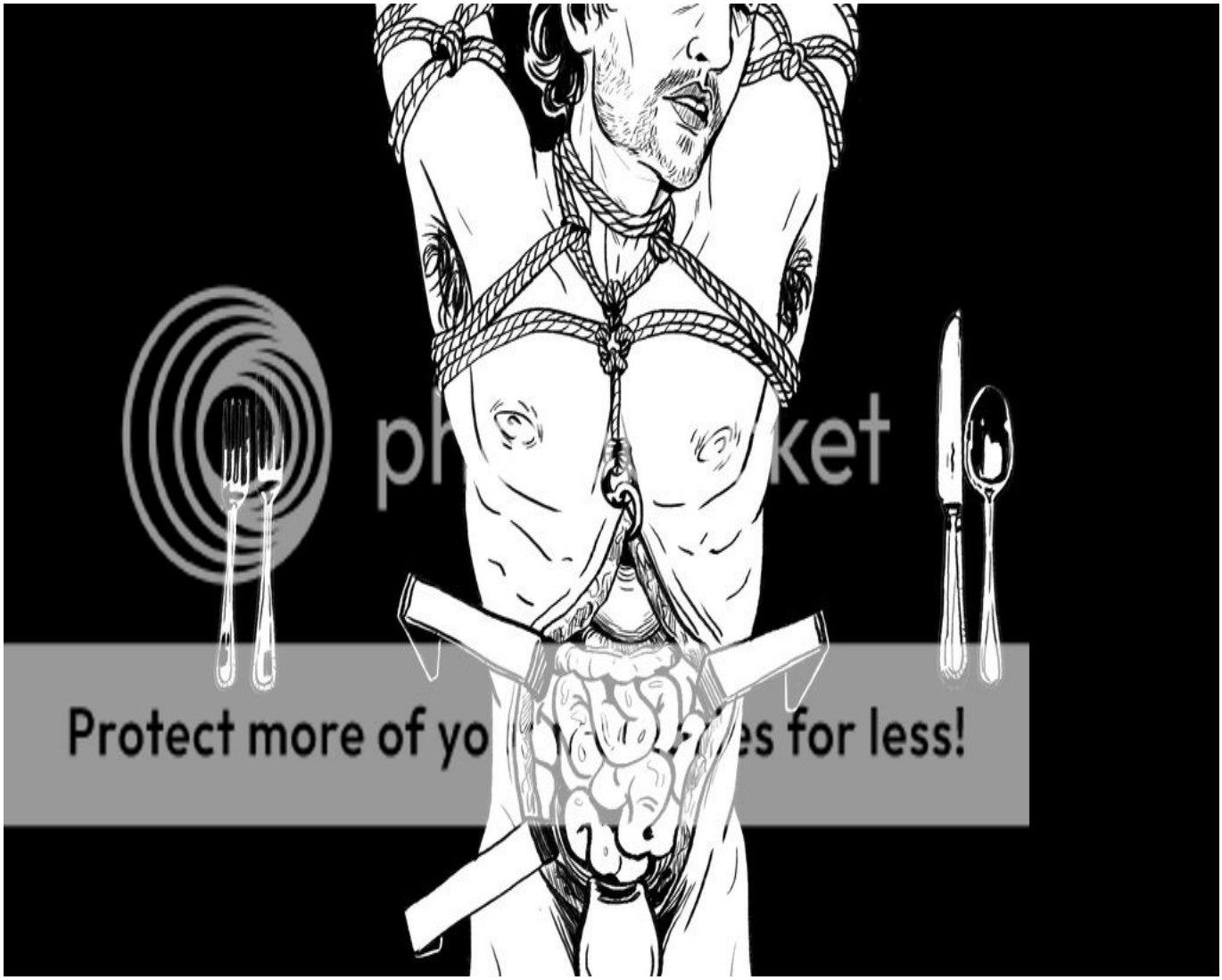
Will gets on Hannibal's dining room table.

Chapter Notes

thank you for the comments and kudos! they are very encouraging.

enjoy the sin. tumblr

content warnings: rope bondage, deep sub space, choking, biting, weird horny sleep times, Hannibal being a creep.



Will went home to shower and change after his lectures, infuriated with himself for struggling to pick out clothes. Hannibal would be dressed flawlessly, and Will had exactly two looks in his closet: weary professor and filthy fisherman. He had never cared about his appearance around Hannibal before, and it wasn't like this was a date, he wouldn't be expecting Will to dress differently. But a part of him wanted to dress differently for Hannibal. He contemplated shaving.

He gave up and settled for jeans, the least wrinkled flannel shirt in his wardrobe, and a thin grey sweater. He made an attempt at fixing his curly hair, but there was nothing to be done. He fed the dogs, and began his drive to Baltimore.

Hannibal had asked him -- no, told him -- to consider what he wanted. Will had been supremely distracted by this task. His head was filled with crime scenes, fishing line, and Hannibal's teeth on his neck. His headaches were persistent, his shoulders tense. He hadn't thought of Hannibal sexually before, but now it felt inevitable. Will had had sex with men before, years and years ago, but he had pushed sex from his mind for so long that it hadn't even occurred to him to think of Hannibal in that way. Now he couldn't keep it from his mind.

It was disturbingly easy for Hannibal to take the role of the dominator in his fantasies. He imagined Hannibal greeting him at the door of his house and slamming his skull into the wall, dragging him

by the hair to his bedroom to be used. His brain was on fire, images flashing before his eyes so insistently he felt nauseous. He couldn't put a lid on them. He kept imagining the flat edge of Hannibal's cooking knives against his chest.

He was exhausted by the time he reached Hannibal's. He had bought a bottle of red wine, knowing that it probably wouldn't be up to Hannibal's standards. He sat in the car for a few minutes, thinking about driving away, knowing that he wouldn't.

Hannibal greeted him at the door with a warm voice and a slight smile. "Good evening, Will." He was wearing a blue plaid suit and waistcoat and a maroon tie, a look Will had seen before, probably Hannibal's version of casual. Something to set Will at ease. Will was not at ease.

He looked down at his shoes, finding it difficult to cross the threshold.

"Please come in," Hannibal said, and Will couldn't refuse him. He entered, and they made their way to the kitchen.

"I brought wine," Will said, looking everywhere but at Hannibal. "It's probably no good."

Hannibal took it from him and examined the bottle. "Cabernet Sauvignon. It would go well with what I am cooking, but I think I will save it. After all, it marks a special occasion."

"You could just say you don't like it," Will mumbled.

"And I would," Hannibal said smoothly. "I don't like lying, especially to you. Many things taste better if you wait for them. I would give this another five years."

Will chuckled. "Fine. Sure."

Hannibal received another bottle from his cellar and poured two glasses. When he handed Will his glass, their fingers brushed, and Will could feel it like an electric shock. His eyes rose briefly to meet Hannibal's.

"Another cabernet," Hannibal explained, fingers lingering for a moment. "From Chile. It will accompany our catfish and squid ink gnocchi."

Will brought his glass up to his nose, then took a sip. "I should have brought fish instead of wine."

"Perhaps next time," Hannibal said, returning to the stove. "I would love to cook what you catch me."

Will watched him prepare their meal in silence. Hannibal garnished the plates beautifully, and Will wondered what those precise hands could do to him.

When they sat down at the table, Will's stomach was in knots. The wine was helping only so much -- he kept thinking about rope against his flesh and being arranged on the table as a bloody centerpiece, fruits and flowers bursting from his ribs. "This is delicious," he managed to say, after Hannibal explained the components of the meal. He managed a few bites before putting the fork down.

"You're not enjoying it," Hannibal said, an observation without judgement or disappointment.

"I feel nauseous," Will confessed. "It's not the food, really, it tastes amazing."

'Finish your meal Will.' On his knees, licking up scraps from the polished floor, Hannibal's shoe between his shoulders.

Will flinched, nearly knocking his glass. He recovered and took a gulp of wine.

"How fares your case?" Hannibal asked, not bothered by Will's spasms.

"Well, there hasn't been another body," Will said, grateful for a subject he knew how to talk about.

"But you think there will be," Hannibal observed.

Will nodded. "He hasn't finished showing the world his vision. He'll kill again, and this time the web will be more elaborate. Jack's breathing down my neck, but I need more information, I'm missing something."

"No leads, and your profile is incomplete."

"I can't see him clearly," Will explained. "I can't tell if I'm projecting, reading something that isn't there."

"What about this killer feels unusual?"

Will gathered his thoughts. "The men are posed almost sexually, but he's not sexually interested in them. It's maybe humiliation, but that doesn't feel quite right either. I don't understand how he sees them."

"How do you see them?"

Will looked down at the table. There was no runner or elaborate centerpiece. Hannibal wouldn't have to clear much before laying him out on it. "They're like dolls," he answered. "Standing in for something. I feel like Im looking at a tableau." He took another bite of food, his stomach somewhat better.

"The picture is incomplete," Hannibal said. "Maybe until the viewer steps in."

"Maybe," Will murmured. He swallowed, and looked at Hannibal. "What are we doing?"

"Eating dinner."

"After."

Hannibal smirked. "Dessert."

Will chuckled. "And what's for desert?"

"That depends on what you want," Hannibal said evenly. "Have you thought more on what you want from me? It will be easier for me to make decisions if I understand your desires and limitations."

"I don't want to make decisions," Will said meekly.

"Then I will make them for you. Tell me what you want, Will."

Will bit his lip. "I -- the table. Anywhere. I want to be restrained," he choked out. His face felt hot. "And, if you -- you said you wanted to touch me?"

"You want this to be sexual as well," Hannibal clarified.

"God," Will hissed, eyes fluttering shut. "Anything you want."

"A dangerous thing to say, Will," Hannibal replied. God, how was he so composed? "Limitations will keep us both safe."

Will shook his head. "I'm not sure how much more specific I can get. Don't leave any marks I can't cover."

Hannibal's eyes darkened. "Do you want me to hurt you, Will?"

Maybe some of his imaginings came from Hannibal's desires as well. Will could pick up on the smallest clues. Normally so composed, no wasted movement, Will could see Hannibal forcing him onto the table as he struggled, letting him go so he might resist and be recaptured. Will could also feel a primal urge carefully hidden under Hannibal's skin that had shuddered to life when he smelled Will.

"I don't know," Will admitted. "I would let you. I want to be overwhelmed."

Hannibal tilted his head. "I think I can accomplish that."

Wills hands were trembling. "I can't believe this is happening." He rubbed his face. "Is there anything you want out of this?"

"Anything I want, I will take from you."

A jolt of pleasure shot through Will, and he gripped the edge of the table. His jaw worked around the nameless monster growing inside him, like a dream where he tried to scream but couldn't. "God. Fuck. Do we need a safe word?"

"Yes."

"You decide."

Hannibal considered for a minute, enjoying his last sip of wine. "Obsidian," he decided on. "In mesoamerica the Aztecs used obsidian as mirrors. They had a deity whose name translates to 'smoke mirror' or obsidian: Tezcatlipoca.

"What's he the god of?"

Hannibal smiled. "Among many things, the night sky, hurricanes, discord, temptation, beauty, and war."

"Alright," Will said. "Obsidian."

They finished dinner, and Hannibal accepted Will's help cleaning the dishes. Will's heart was in his throat, but he was pleasantly excited as well. Hannibal wanted to participate in the fantasies Will never thought he could realize; it was unbelievable, but if he was sleep walking again, he didn't want to wake up.

The dishes were done. Will just stood facing Hannibal. Hannibal looked over him slowly, and beckoned him over. Will drifted to him like he was tied to his fingers, and looked up; Hannibal wasn't much taller than him, but he seemed massive, the breadth of his shoulders swallowing Will, and he imagined folding up into Hannibal and being crushed like a star before a black hole. Hannibal drew one hand down Will's arm while the other fisted lightly in his hair, tilting his head to the side. Hannibal leaned in and scented Will, his cheek barely touching his neck. Will shuddered. He could feel the heat coming off of Hannibal's body, could feel the exact number of inches between them.

Hannibal pulled back, eyes alight. He took Will's hand and lead him back into the dining room. The table was bare except for several lengths of black coiled rope. Will's knees were practically knocking together. Hannibal undid the solitary button of his sports jacket and removed it, undid the buttons on the cuffs of his dark blue shirt. "Take of your clothes," he said simply, almost clinically. "You may leave your underwear if you wish."

Will pulled off his sweater, his head filled with fog. He unbuttoned his flannel shirt, kicked off his shoes, and slid of his pants. He was left with his white undershirt and boxers, holding on to the hem of his shirt like it was his last grasp on reality. He could feel Hannibal watching, felt himself start to harden under his eyes. Will pulled the shirt over his head.

He felt naked enough like this, and looked up at Hannibal, weary, exhausted. He wasn't embarrassed in the way he expected. In his minds eye he was covered in wounds, some fresh and bleeding, others scarred over. He felt like Hannibal could see them. Fear was there, of being rejected like this, of not being seen, but he could feel Hannibal's desire like it was his own.

Hannibal stepped forward until they were pressed up against each other and the edge of the table, hands on Will's hips. Will gasped, and then Hannibal's broad, soft lips were on his. The kiss burned him from head to toe. It started delicate, as if the meeting of their lips were a paradox and could be undone at any moment. Hannibal slowly moved their mouths together, and Will's lips parted to taste him, greedy and insistent. Hannibal's mouth was slick and warm, and the taste was going straight to Will's groin (Hannibal could feel that, he knew).

Hannibal sucked on his lip, hard, and pulled back. "Lay on the table," he ordered, eyes dilated to be nearly black under the hood of his brow. Stunned, Will pulled himself up on the table and lowered onto his back, unable to look away from Hannibal. Hannibal circled around the table, examining Will from every angle, utterly shameless in the way he looked. Hannibal took one of the lengths of black rope, ran the black braid through his hands, measuring it in half. With exact and dispassionate gestures, Hannibal laid the rope beneath Will's shoulders. "Arms above your head," Hannibal said. He pulled the two lengths around Will's armpits, and wrapped two bands around the top of his arms.

"God," Will breathed as Hannibal caressed the inside of his arms. This wasn't happening, and yet, impossibly, it was. His arms were wrapped just under the elbow, and again as his wrists were bound together. Will closed his eyes and felt the weight of the rope on his arms as Hannibal tied the ends to the table legs. He tried to keep his breathing steady, listening to Hannibal work with the rope. He would occasionally test the tightness of the rope with a finger, and pinched Will's fingertips to see the blood refill.

Will stared at the ceiling. Hannibal didn't speak, and his focus was on artfully tying the rope. Will was grateful for that. Too often in intimate moments, Will projected what his partner felt, getting

lost in his empathy, and came out of the experiences unsure if he had really participated. Hannibal did not expect Will to react for him.

Next, Hannibal spread Will's legs wide, and wrapped thick bands around his ankles. By the time he was done, Will could feel the stretch already in his inner thighs.

"How does that feel?" Hannibal asked.

Will tested his bonds. He couldn't move his arms or legs, but could lift his hips off the table. He gave a few hard yanks, and there was something comforting in the strength of the restraints. "It feels good," he breathed.

"Good," Hannibal purred.

The light in the dining room was dim. Will could barely hear Hannibal move over the hammering of his heart. Hannibal traced two fingers from Will's hands, down his arms and ribs to his hip. "Beautiful," he muttered, and Will moaned deep in his throat. Hannibal traced the shapes of his face, brushing a thumb over Will's lips. "Look at me."

Will obeyed. Hannibal's face was in shadow, his eyes dark pits. Will struggled to keep his eyes focused. God, he was already hard. His skin was fire wherever Hannibal touched him, and he had barely touched him. Hannibal brushed the stubble of Will's jaw, and lowered his hand to wrap around Will's throat. Felt the pulse where they met. Hannibal pressed up under his jaw, slowly squeezing the air out of him. Hannibal's eyes grew impossibly darker, or maybe that was Will's overactive imagination, turning Hannibal to a tar black monster. Will's mouth parted slightly as he was gently choked, and the sensation was an even more comfortable restraint than the ropes. His eyes wavered, vision clouded by soft dots of light.

Hannibal released him and Will breathed hard, gasping, wanting more. Hannibal was on the table now, looming over Will, who arched up towards him. Lowering his head, Hannibal scraped his teeth on Will's neck, tasting the skin with a low growl. Will cursed, yanked at his restraints, and Hannibal bit hard at the place where neck met shoulder.

There was no testing of teeth on skin, no gentle start — Hannibal bit viciously. Will cried out from the sudden pain, and his back arched up from the table. Hannibal pushed him back down with a hand on the center of his chest, not gently, and bit even harder. "Fuck! Hannibal," Will whimpered. Hannibal licked the bite mark, sucking at it until it ached terribly. Will squirmed, discomfort and pain mixing with arousal. He lifted his hips again, trying to find some friction, but Hannibal was on all fours over Will, keeping their bodies apart.

Hannibal bit him again on his shoulder, and then mirrored the marks on the other side, taking his time. Will bucked, and Hannibal forced him back down with a forearm on his sternum. Tears pricked Will's eyes -- the pain, the lack of sensual touch, the way Hannibal ignored him. He was painfully hard and the inside of his legs were on fire. But his comfort and sexual gratification didn't matter: Hannibal was doing what he wanted with no regard for Will, and what he wanted was to paint Will's flesh with bruising bite marks. Hannibal lowered himself and caught one of Will's nipples in his mouth, sucking hard and then licking gently, teasing them until the gentlest touch was painful. His hands clamped tightly at Will's sides, fingers digging into flesh.

Hannibal kissed him savagely, licking up into Will's mouth and sucking on his lips until they felt bruised as well. Will yanked at his restraints without realizing it, wanting to wrap his hands around Hannibal and choke on his kiss, have his mouth deeper, somehow. Hannibal ate his moans and

whines, filled Will's head with the taste of him. Will felt the burn as Hannibal pulled tightly at his hair, so tight Will felt light-headed, and Hannibal thrust his tongue deep into Will's mouth.

Will was overwhelmed. Shuddering and whining, nearly convulsing under Hannibal's hands. When Hannibal finished kissing Will, he put two fingers in his mouth and Will took them like a gift, sucking on them. Hannibal yanked at Will's dark curls rhythmically, thrusting into Will's mouth with his other hand. Will's eyes blurred with tears. He felt phantom hands all over him, thrusting in and out of his skin, pinching him, scratching him. He was lost in the sensations, forgetting everything around him. His mouth filled with saliva, lips slick, choking when Hannibal pushed too deep, knuckles brushing his lips.

An orchestra of sensations: bright, sustained pain at his scalp, the warm ache of his muscles, the steady thrum of the bite marks, the exquisite taste of Hannibal’s fingers and his spit, and a burning itch to tear off his own skin.

Hannibal played with Will past the point of his own comfort: his hand ached from yanking Will's hair, and his fingers were beginning to bruise from brushing against Will's teeth. Still, he persisted. Will had fallen into an extremely submissive state, almost hypnotized, and Hannibal checked his eyes response to light every few minutes to check that he was still conscious.

"You're perfect," Hannibal breathed across his skin, withdrawing his fingers and tasting them. "Look at you. A work of art." Hannibal sat on the edge of the table, unbuttoning his waistcoat and admiring his work. Will's bruises were blooming with color around the marks of Hannibal's teeth. There was a sheen of sweat on his skin, and he trembled all over, utterly overwhelmed.

“Will. Nod if you can hear me.”

Will did so, barely. It was a shame that Will had said not to leave marks that couldn’t be covered. Hannibal longed to sink his teeth into Will’s neck, and brand him for the world to see. He could take anything he wanted now, but pursuing his singular desires held far less interest than exploring Will’s.

Hannibal ran his hands over Will’s chest and down his thighs, taking his time in memorizing his body. He put pressure on the bruises until Will let out an exhausted moan of pain, keeping him stimulated. He brushed his knuckles over nipples terribly lightly, and then harder down the ridges of ribs. He palmed Will’s erection through the thin cotton of his boxes, and the stimulation was too much. Will cried out, twisting his hips in a feeble attempt to get away from Hannibal’s touch. Hannibal persisted, but gently, the stroke of his palm steady. Will sobbed quietly, but the twisting of his hips transformed to rolling into Hannibal’s hand weakly. Hannibal kissed him everywhere, testing skin, muscle, and bone with his teeth. The ease at which he could bite off a piece of Will flooded him with desperation, but he didn’t want a piece — he wanted to consume Will completely, for eternity.

Will came with a ragged cry, face contorted beautifully in pain. Hannibal kissed his slack mouth. He allowed himself a moment of staring at the perfect creature splayed on his table before crawling off him. A hand to his stomach, Hannibal straightened and took slow breaths. Will was in another place, trembling occasionally. Hannibal worked quickly to undue his restraints, lifting Will’s arms gently. The ropes had left red indentations in his skin, sensitive under Hannibal’s touch. Will barely seemed to register what was happening.

Hannibal checked his capillary refill and pulse. Touched the streaks of tears on Will's cheek. He hadn't bit hard enough to pierce skin, but he checked the bites anyway. Satisfied with Will's state of health, Hannibal gathered him up in his arms. Will made a small, pleading noise as he was moved, and pressed his face into Hannibal's neck, breathing harshly. Affection swelled in Hannibal, not exactly unexpected, but startling in its warmth. He carried Will upstairs to his bedroom.

Hannibal laid Will out on the duvet. He then stood to get water for both of them, but Will caught his sleeve weakly, his eyes fluttering, his mouth shaking around his words. "Don't," was all Will managed to get out.

Hannibal smiled. So needy. "We both need water. I will be gone but a moment."

Will shook his head, a look of pain on his face far more severe than those he wore on the table. "Don't leave," he pleaded, throat tense. "Just a minute."

Hannibal smoothed Will's curls from his sweaty forehead, and placed an affectionate kiss there. He lay on the bed beside Will, and the other man curled towards him, burying his head again near Hannibal's chest. Will's breathing was labored, and he sobbed without tears. Hannibal wrapped an arm protectively around him, counting the rate of his breathing, ready to intervene if necessary. Will's sobs weakened as exhaustion took over, until he merely keened softly.

Will had made himself vulnerable to Hannibal, which thrilled him. His only source of regret was that Will did not know him, or understand what Hannibal could do to him, paint a portrait with his body far beyond the expectations of Will's gruesome imagination. Hannibal thought of making Will a centerpiece on his table, slicing off pieces to cook and feed Will. He could make it last for days, until Will and he had completely consumed him. There was no one Hannibal would share that feast with; none were worthy to touch Will let alone consume him.

The opportunities before him were tempting, but Hannibal knew he would not take what he truly wanted until Will made himself vulnerable before it, knowing what Hannibal would do and wanting it. Begging for it. Hannibal wanted to see his reflection in Will. He wanted to be seen.

Hannibal was loathe to leave Will, but taking care of Will afterwards was nearly as important as wrecking him. He got them both water, drinking his first, and then sat Will up to help him drink. Will was still dazed, but more awake. Hannibal soothed him by gently rubbing circles into his back, keeping skin to skin contact, and when Will was ready for the sensation, wrapping him in a blanket.

They settled together on the bed, and slowly Will came back to himself. "I didn't plan on staying the night," Will mumbled.

"I can drive you back to Wolf Trap, or you can stay here," Hannibal told him. "I have things you could borrow."

"I don't want to leave," Will breathed. "But..."

"Then you will stay."

"I need to let the dogs out in the morning. Should be good to drive then." Will pulled the blanket around him tighter, looking down. Though he was exhausted, moments of shame and uncertainty passed over his face. "Is this okay? Are we…"

Hannibal turned towards him, and cupped his face in both hands. “You were perfect,” Hannibal said in a firm voice. “Utterly gorgeous and captivating. You took to the restraints so well. You needn’t worry about anything; leave it in my hands.”

Will closed his eyes, shaking his head slightly in Hannibal’s hands. “You can’t…” Want this? Want him? Will bit his lip. “I’m sorry,” he said.

Hannibal smoothed his hands down Will’s neck and shoulders, eyeing the marks he left. "I have a guest bedroom, if you'd rather me leave you with your shame."

Will breathed sharply through his nose, eyes flashing to Hannibal's. "I have night terrors. You don't want me sweating and kicking in your bed."

Hannibal's eyes grew dark with amusement and desire, but his voice was mild when he spoke. "I don't wish for you to concern yourself with my comfort." He pressed down on one of Will's bruises, mouth curving in a devilish smile. "Don't tell me what I do or do not want."

Will surged up to kiss him, limbs still weak. He hooked an arm around Hannibal's neck and pulled him into the kiss, tasting him. Let his mouth show Hannibal that Will wanted him since it wouldn't form the words. Hannibal responded mildly, letting Will take what he wanted. Will broke the kiss and pressed their foreheads together, mouth gaping open. "I was trying to say 'thank you'," Will explained in a tired voice. "But then I thought you couldn't have understood my fantasies, wouldn't have me in your bed if you actually saw what I do to myself in my head, what I might want from you." He pressed their heads together, voice high and pained. "Hannibal, I feel so fucked up and if you tell me it's alright I'm afraid what I would do to prove you wrong."

Hannibal stroked his cheek. If only they could press closer, so that their skulls occupied the same place. "I will endeavor to truly exhaust you next time," was all he said, "so that you have no energy to engage these worries."

Will smiled weakly. "Okay. I want to apologize again."

"I won't allow it."

"Okay."

o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o

Will woke Hannibal in the middle of the night, tangled up in the sheets and moaning pitifully as nightmares beset him. Hannibal turned and watched him: the fluttering motion behind his eyelids, the sheen of sweat making his skin shine in the darkness, the way he clawed at his skin. Will lifted and twisted his body, small motions that lead Hannibal to imagine Will throwing himself against the bars of a cage, battering himself. Hannibal took his pulse, and sighed in contentment. It was such a gift to view this.

Will's eyes fluttered open, unseeing, moving erratically back and forth. Still dreaming then. Will sat up sluggishly, and Hannibal held his arm, right above the elbow where there were still rope marks.

Carefully, Hannibal guided Will until he was sitting on his lap. Hannibal took Will's hands, and placed them on his own neck.

Will's head bobbed like a buoy on a dark ocean, eyes blank and lips twitching. Hannibal squeezed down on Will's hands, watching the dream transform in Will's bitten and bruised body. Will rocked his hips, breath coming faster, and began to squeeze Hannibal's throat on his own. Hannibal caressed his forearms, gently encouraging him, ready to throw Will off him if he needed to. Will rocked his hips harder, and began to squeeze in earnest, fear and hatred and dangerous arousal flickering across his face like ghosts.

It wouldn't do to leave marks. Hannibal broke Will's grip and pulled him in a tight embrace, keeping them both safe from his thrashing. Hannibal would have to probe gently to figure out what would wake him, and what he could sleep through. Hannibal inhaled deeply, smelling sweat, Will's shampoo, arousal, and again that fever burning up his brain. Will ground his hips against Hannibal's thigh, making small pained noises, and Hannibal let him ride out the nightmare, felt it smear against his skin.

o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o

Will looked at himself in the mirror of Hannibal's bathroom. The damage from last night was painted on his body vividly. He admired the symmetrical pattern of bite marks on his collar, the bruises purple around red indentations. When he touched them he could recall with perfect clarity the sensation of Hannibal biting him and all his desire and arousal. True to his word, Hannibal hadn't marked him in a place he couldn't conceal, but if he didn't wear a collared shirt the bruise would peek out. The idea had a certain appeal.

There were other marks across his skin, small red welts and hickeys. He traced them with his fingers. Fucking Hannibal had made them all symmetrical on each side. A constellation of wounds on his body. And then the rope marks, like pink snakes twisting around his limbs.

Will felt relaxed in a way he hadn't expected. He hadn't realized how incredibly tense all of his muscles were. Many of the knots still remained, and he was incredibly sore, but there was a looseness there as well. Being tied up and hurt had taken some of the edge off. He could look at his reflection in the mirror and see his real face, not Garrett Jacob Hobbs or the other killers prowling in his mind.

He returned to the bedroom and changed into his clothes from yesterday. Hannibal had been kind enough to bring up his clothes, and lay them out alongside some of his own clothes to borrow. Giving Will options. But Will was just heading back to his house and could change there, and he didn't want to ruin Hannibal's clothes with dog hair and saliva. Maybe someday he would feel like he could wear the things Hannibal wore, let the older man dress him so Will might be brought into his world. Will sneered at the thought of going to the opera on Hannibal's arm.

Downstairs, Hannibal was making breakfast, still in his robe. "Good morning, Will," he said, voice deep and thick with his accent. "I'll make you some coffee."

"Thanks." Will leaned up against the counter, watching him. Hannibal felt more open than before, like curtains were parted to let light into the recessed palace of his mind. He knew Hannibal built

careful walls around himself, and this morning it felt like one of the many barricades was removed. Will felt, as if it was his own, Hannibal's gentle enjoyment of preparing coffee and being at home in his kitchen with Will.

Hannibal brought him the glass of coffee, stepping closer than he had the last time Will was here. Their fingers brushed again, a lingering touch. "Thank you," Will said, relaxing against the counter and moving imperceptibly closer to Hannibal. Hips canted. Neck tilted. He took a sip of coffee, but his eyes returned to Hannibal's.

Hannibal took a half step forward so his foot was between Will's, and rested his broad hand on his hip, leaning closer. "Stay for breakfast?" Hannibal asked softly, bringing his face as close as he could while retaining eye contact.

Will set the coffee on the counter. He couldn't decide whether to look at Hannibal's eyes or his lips. "Now you're asking?" Will teased.

"Would you prefer me to order you to dine at my pleasure?" Hannibal responded with a smile. "I would cook your every meal, and you would have little time for lecturing and hunting killers."

"I'd prefer you to take what you wanted and to hell with my preference." Will leaned closer, brushing his lips on the corner of Hannibal's mouth. His hands found purchase on Hannibal's arms.

Hannibal made a considering noise, and rubbed gentle circles in Will's hip. "What if I ordered you to get rid of your dogs, quit the BAU, and to accompany me to the opera every weekend?"

Will groaned in displeasure. "Fine. You've made your point." He kissed Hannibal briefly, and then hesitated.

Hannibal put his other hand on Will's hip, speaking against his lips. "You want to be desired and I desire to give you what you want. Perhaps eventually we will peel back the layers to find the core of what we want."

"I can think of many things that I want," Will muttered, almost a snarl.

Hannibal pulled their bodies together and kissed him, brief but hard. "I will finish breakfast and we will eat. Then I will let you go."

Shibari

Chapter Summary

Will needs a release. Hannibal ties him up again.

Chapter Notes

a long chapter for you -

cw: con-non-con, dub-con, non-graphic fantasies of rape. we're getting into some consensual non-consent territory without an explicit negotiation scene. this is going to come up in this fic because sexual assault is part of the blend of torture that Will subjects himself in his mind. this chapter is pretty mild imo. you have been warned.

also: some self harm, violent fantasies (every chapter tbh), rope bondage, blindfolds, slapping, struggling, groping, sexy stuff that’s not penetration.

I'm rewatching the show now and I'll take pieces from it as I see fit. obviously this isn't following cannon, but I am excited to rewrite some scenes that happen in the tv show. my original "marionette murderer" is going to take the place of some of the killers of the week; I'm really pumped to get into it.

tumblr

Will was beset by desires. Will was beset by demons.

His head was full of thoughts and he couldn't turn any of them off. Throughout the days he felt the whip of metal cord against his skin like the snap of a fly rod; wire and thorns crawling over his skin; fingers tearing into him; the scrape of flesh and concrete on his nails. He didn't know how much he slept. Wet dreams and nightmares became the same thing, and he rolled in pleasure as the stag eviscerated him and devoured his organs. He came to sweating and hard and fucked into his hand sobbing in frustration.

Individually, the obsessive thoughts were manageable. He could ignore the visions of flesh penetrated by his blade, screams of pain, wires drawn tight. But they repeated over and over again, instant as flies swarming a corpse, and he never realized before how much thoughts could physically hurt. Will was mounted as a scarecrow in the fields of his mind, and the birds were pecking him to pieces slowly.

Freddie Lounds got her hands on a photo from their latest crime scene and dubbed the killer 'The Marionette Murderer' and the name stuck. The public panicked, and Jack was all fury, but no amount of yelling at the team was going to materialize evidence. Will stared at the photos of the victims and felt his body tugged into an artful and deadly arrangement. They reexamined the bodies and Will had to clench his fists to resist running his hands over the cuts left by the wires.

When the pain from phantom wounds and whispers in his head became unbearable, Will pressed on the bruises Hannibal left, comforted by the real sensation there. He grabbed his wrists, squeezing down on the rope marks there, and the thoughts lessened. The bruises lingered, and Will felt a perverse pleasure in maintaining the bruises for Hannibal to see next time.

Jack used Will as his mirror. Will told him that looking wasn't good for him, but Jack didn't care, told him to go to Hannibal to put himself back together. Will almost told him that he had been hallucinating, but Jack wouldn't care, and Will wasn't ready to admit that the intrusive thoughts were becoming something more sinister. He looked into the minds of killers and recreated their designs in his head. Murdering himself. Embellishing.

Will imagined being cut and raped by a tar black monster with antlers. A cut for every thrust. In his fantasy, he somehow crawled to Hannibal's backyard before collapsing in the snow. Hannibal wasn't there, and Will began to freeze in the winter night, blood seeping from his ragged clothes to mingle with the snow. Hannibal would find him just before he froze to death. Carry him inside. Strip him of his frozen clothes and would see the horror painted in rows of cuts on his skin. Sometimes Hannibal tended to his wounds clinically and without emotion; other times he would be composed but distraught. Will was broken, staring at him with dead eyes.

Will felt the strings under his skin and pulled at them. He felt in control, observing his self-destructive descent from the outside. Then he would feel lost, realizing he was scratching the inside of his wrist long after he began to bleed.

When he came to Hannibal for his session, he was hanging on by his last thread that day. He spent the first twenty minutes pacing and rubbing his arms, responding to Hannibal's prompts tersely. It'd been less than a week since they had seen each other, but it felt far too long.

"Sit down, Will," Hannibal said, and Will heard the softly commanding tone. He sat. Obeyed. Hung his head in his hands.

"I don't know how much more of this I can take," Will breathes, harshly. "I can't stop thinking, feeling."

"What have you used in the past to quell your active mind?" Hannibal asked.

"Running with the dogs," Will replied. "Fishing. It's not enough. The only way I can concentrate is by wrapping the line around my hands."

"Tell me about your fantasies, Will."

He laughed, searching Hannibal's chiseled features. No desire to be found there. Hannibal wasn't giving anything away. "I wonder what I could say to turn you off," he said bitterly.

"I invite you to try," Hannibal replied evenly. "You are disturbed by your desires. Let me understand why."

"I think about you fucking my mouth, forcing me to choke on your dick."

Hannibal pressed his lips together in mild distaste for Will's language. But besides that, he didn't show that he was bothered.

"I think about you forcing your entire arm down my throat," Will went on, and Hannibal's eyes flashed wide in surprise. A thrill ran through Will, and he pressed on. "You grab hold of my insides and rip them out of me."

Hannibal was caught of guard, but only for a moment before he composed himself. His eyes closed briefly. "Is there a difference in your mind between murder and sex?" Hannibal asked.

"It's growing thinner," Will said precisely. "Sometimes you heal the cuts, and other times you press your fingers inside."

Hannibal raised an eyebrow. "The cuts?"

Will blinked. He had forgotten that Hannibal couldn't see them. "I'm covered in them," he explained. "Even, precise stab wounds. Rows of them. An entire fucking grid."

Hannibal glanced over him. "Are you purposefully harming yourself?"

Will laughed again. "Thinking hurts me. The rest is just relief."

"And how do you relieve yourself?"

Will clenched his jaw. "Scratching. Tying fishing line around my wrists until my fingers turn purple. Don't mistake this for what it's not -- I'm not habitually self-harming, nothing drastic."

"You harm yourself every time you walk into a crime scene," Hannibal countered. "You cannot put yourself back together and heal if you keep traumatizing yourself."

"I manage," Will spat.

"Your coping mechanisms suggest otherwise."

Will sneered. "Jack won't care if the wounds are suddenly visible."

"Revealing yourself to Jack wouldn't satisfy you," Hannibal observed. "Still, you could raise enough concern that someone on the team might report him."

Will shook his head. "That's never going to happen. And that's not why I seek relief."

"You do so because you have to."

"I'm trying not to burst at the seams."

"You do not have to continue to work for Jack, yet you keep throwing yourself on that sword. It is your decision to keep returning to the source of your trauma."

"Are you so sure that that's the source?"

Hannibal narrowed his eyes, faint displeasure on his features. "How can you hope to understand yourself if you continue to dive into the nightmares of others?"

Will looked away, and tried to put more authority in his voice than he felt. "I can't stop. I won't. I need to find a way to manage this."

Hannibal sighed, almost imperceptibly. Will looked back at him. Hannibal's mind was quiet to Will, as he wasn't telegraphing his emotions, cool and still like a statue. Will let himself look. His mind was everywhere, strings of light flashing, pulled taught, snapping. Words not his own, spoken in his voice. Normally when Will looked at people he was overwhelmed by what he saw: the micro expressions flooded him, bounced in his house of mirrors. He hadn't been able to make eye contact all week, not even with Alana. With all the noise in his brain, he didn't want anyone else in there with him. But looking at Hannibal was bearable.

"I want satisfaction," Will said, imagining Hannibal's teeth on him. "I want relief." Antlers penetrating him, piercing him to the chair before Hannibal. Will wasn't sure whether it was his imagination when Hannibal's brown eyes turned dark red, almost devoid of white.

"What do you see, Will?" Hannibal's voice reverberated around the room.

"It's more focused, but vivid," Will said calmly as the antlers wrapped around his arms, molding to him. "I can feel you biting me. Antlers pierce through me, pinning me to the chair. At every place you marked. I can't move."

"Are we still in my office?" Hannibal inquired, his voice strangely echoing.

Will looked around. He still saw the world for what it was with the overlay of his vivid imagination. "I'm still here," he answered, "But we're in a forest too. A dark grove. Brambles and thorns."

Will heard the crunch of leaves underneath hooves and shuddered, closing his eyes briefly. He needed Hannibal to anchor him now, and locked eyes with him. "The antlers grow, stretching my wounds, opening me up. Moving in me. You're -- you're just sitting there. Watching."

He couldn't read anything in Hannibal's face, and that disturbed him. Was he truly so dispassionate, or trying so hard to be unreadable? Was he attempting to be a mirror for Will? "What would you have me do?" Hannibal asked.

Will struggled against the chair, hands clenching. The antlers coiled around him, burned within him. For a moment, he wasn't sure what direction the fantasy would go. Confusion passed over his face, and when he spoke, his voice was trembling. "You... you don't do anything." There was a strangled quality to his voice. "You wait for me to come to you."

Hannibal made a low noise of pleasure. "It's a reprise of the surgery scene. In order for you to get what you want, you must risk your life, wounding yourself by removing the weapons others have left in you."

Will could imagine it perfectly. Grabbing the armrests of the chair and hauling himself up off the antlers, the way they slid through him, strings of black blood connecting the tips of the antlers to his gaping punctures. Stumbling to Hannibal, only making it a few steps before falling to his knees, gushing blood on the carpet. Will closed his eyes. Let go of the fantasy and cleared his mind with the slice of light through the dark. He rubbed a hand over his mouth.

Hannibal considered him. "If you wish to come to me now, you may. You are not pinned to your seat."

"Should I kneel before your feet and show you my bleeding heart?" Will asked, a hint of venom in his voice.

"Are you ashamed of your attraction to me?"

"I'm not even going to dignify that with a response."

"You deprive yourself. To punish yourself, or because you think you don't deserve what you desire, or revulsion for yourself, I'm not certain." Hannibal tilted his head. "Tell me why. Or do you not wish to sit at my feet unless you really are bleeding?"

Will clenched his jaw. He felt defensive, and wasn't sure why. "What do you fantasize about, Dr. Lecter?"

A slight tension passed over Hannibal's face. "I rarely occupy my time fantasizing. I revisit fond memories, and if there is something I desire I acquire it for myself. I am not gifted with your imagination but nor am I preoccupied with forbidden desires."

Will leaned forward in his chair, grinning. "Surely there must be something you deprive yourself of."

"I have made it a habit of not depriving myself of life's pleasures," Hannibal replied. "I have built a comfortable life for myself, and there is little I want for."

Will bit his lip. "Sounds nice," he muttered snidely.

"You want intimacy and vulnerability," Hannibal said. "But they are difficult for you. You can only imagine yourself being open to me if you are dying and doomed."

Will ground his jaw. Did Hannibal think it was so easy, like there wasn't a thicket of razor wire surrounding Will that prevented him from exposing himself? "If I gave myself what I wanted, you would need to stitch me up."

"There is a difference between stabbing yourself and walking to my chair."

Will shook his head. "They're both blades to cut myself with."

Hannibal turned his wrist up, a slight opening of his hand that read to Will as a summoning. "I've thought of you since our last encounter," Hannibal said, giving Will some of what he wanted. "Rather insistently, I'll admit. I wonder how my marks have developed over time."

My marks. Will glanced away. He could see in his mind's eye exactly what the marks looked like, and felt them burning. "Do you want to see?"

Hannibal's mouth twitched into a smile. "You would strip in my office, but won't come to me for comfort."

Will flushed. "Just because you can't see the restraints holding me back doesn't mean they're not there."

"Come here," Hannibal said, and something released in Will. He could stand now, and walked the short distance to Hannibal before kneeling before him. Hannibal ran a hand through Will's hair, and he loosened at the touch, leaning into Hannibal's hand. "I think it would be best to keep our activities out of my office, to preserve some barriers. I see you are interested in provoking me."

Hannibal's hand tightened around Will's hair and he gasped, only half in pain. Hannibal leaned forward and dragged Will's head up so he could whisper in his ear. "Don't misunderstand me. I've wanted to bend you over my desk since the moment you walked in. Maybe if I sodomized you for our hour, you wouldn't be able to think, let alone stand."

Will gaped, shuddering. How could the word 'sodomize' sound filthier in Hannibal's mouth than any expletive? Hannibal's words shocked through him.

"I am a patient man," Hannibal muttered. "And I will deprive you of what you want from me, so that I may better understand your fascinating mind." Hannibal released his grip, and stroked Will's hair, gently scratching his scalp. His voice was softer when he spoke. "And I am also your friend, and wish to see you at your best. I have no doubt that you would use me to hurt yourself, like you do with everything in your life. In your mind, you may use me to do unspeakable things to yourself. But you will not force my hand."

Will's head was ringing with blood, but all else was quiet. Take this away from me, he longed, the noise, the cuts, the crime scenes. Don't give me any choices. But even as that desire swelled in him, he thrashed against it. He needed to struggle, then eventually be overcome. He sank into the feeling of Hannibal's hands running through his hair. "Can we go to your place?" Will asked softly. "I need -- I need it."

"Yes," Hannibal said simply. "I will always endeavor to give you what you need."

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Hannibal took his time tying Will up, creating a more elaborate design. Will was beginning to appreciate the process: kneeling still for Hannibal as he wrapped Will, knotted the rope over and over, and admired his work. The feel of Hannibal's hands lacing a rope under one already pressed against Will's skin made him shiver each time. Will was on his knees with his forearms held together before his chest. Hannibal made a diamond pattern cage for Will's chest, and tied a thick braid from Will's tailbone to neck, like a handle bar. Will's forearms were wrapped completely together, but they weren't tied to his chest so he had limited mobility. As Hannibal moved to his legs, Will lifted his forearms until his elbows were at the level of his face, and felt the strain in his shoulders.

Hannibal wrapped Will's calves to their respective thighs, holding him in the kneeling position. Will had left his boxers on again, and neither had commented on that. It was an unspoken way to mark this as different from a purely sexual encounter. There were aspects of it that were sexual, but in Will's mind at least, they weren't having sex, and he didn't know if he wanted to have sex with Hannibal while struggling to give up control. Sensing this boundary, Hannibal didn't have the rope make contact with Will's genitals or run between his cheeks. It somewhat marred the aesthetic, but Hannibal was patient.

"Is it weird that I feel like something you'd put in your oven?" Will said.

Hannibal slipped two fingers between Will's thigh and calf. "I don't have much room to stuff you," Hannibal replied with a smile. "Though I admit I was thinking the same thing. My knot-tying experience has mostly been in the kitchen."

"Being a slab of meat has some appeal," Will murmured.

Hannibal raised his eyes, and they were sparking with humor. "Maybe I should get a meat hook to hang you upon."

Will chuckled. "Are you flirting with me, Dr. Lecter?"

Hannibal smiled, and kissed Will's cheek, watching the gentle flush of his skin. "I could ask you the same thing," he replied, returning to the ropes.

Will rolled his head, feeling the ache in his neck. "I wonder if the Marionette Murderer does this in his spare time."

"Entirely possible," Hannibal said. "The art of kinbaku came from Edo period Japan, where previously rope tying was a means of restraining, transporting, and torturing criminals, dating back to the thirteenth century. An art form I am woefully inexperienced in."

"I think you're doing alright." Will nearly rolled his eyes.

"Practice is the key, as in most things." Hannibal tested the tightness of the ropes by slipping his finger underneath, which Will found inexplicably erotic.

"I thought it was called shibari."

"That became the name for it when the practice was exported internationally. I believe in the 90's. Shibari means 'decoratively tie'." Hannibal cinched a knot tightly and Will felt it pinch against his skin. "Does the Marionette Murderer find his creations erotic? Artistic?"

Will closed his eyes. "Art, yes. Erotic? There's something sexual about them but the act of killing and stringing them up isn't sexual for him. Neither is the end product."

Hannibal hummed in consideration. "Does he want to be seen?"

"Not yet. The next kill, he'll show a little more. It's an inside joke; we already see him, but don't know what we see."

Hannibal smoothed his hands over Will and the ridges of rope on his skin. Pressed along the edges of raised skin next to the black cord. Each bite mark he had left was exposed, framed by the rope, and he pressed down on each until Will squirmed. "Can I blindfold you?" Hannibal asked when he finally met his gaze.

"Yes," Will said at once.

Hannibal grazed his thumb over Will's lip. Will tilted his head back and parted his mouth slightly, letting Hannibal feel him, then took his thumb between teeth. Hannibal's eyes darkened, and he pushed his thumb to the inside of Will's cheek, forcing his head as far to the side as it would go. Will's mouth ached. "Do you want something to bite on?" Hannibal asked quietly.

Will nodded.

Hannibal stood, and smoothed his shirt and waistcoat. He left Will by his armchair, and went to his desk. Will heard the snapping of metal clasps and the soft creak of leather. He closed his eyes, and shifted in his restraints, settling into them. When he heard Hannibal return, he looked up. The height and status difference between them was dizzying; Will nearly naked, Hannibal looking immaculate in his brown and red chevron suit, holding a velvet ribbon and a black plastic bit. Will felt his mouth watering.

Hannibal sat in the armchair behind Will, out of sight. Then there was darkness, as he draped the ribbon over Will's eyes and tied it tight against the base of his skull. Will's heart rate began to accelerate. Hannibal nudged his mouth open wider and placed the bit there before securing it at the back of Will's neck. Will chewed the bit experimentally, feeling saliva build in his mouth and his jaw ache. It felt a bit like choking, and Will remembered Hannibal's hand on his throat. The bit was loose enough that he could push it to rest on his chin, and then take it in his mouth again. He could speak if he needed to.

He heard Hannibal lean back in the chair behind him, and could feel his eyes on him. They hadn't discussed what would happen after Will was tied up, and anticipation squirmed in his chest. For all he knew, Hannibal would leave him like this until Will begged to be released. He sighed around the bit, and waited.

Time ticked by. Without sight or much sound, Will's brain was filling in the gaps, turning creaks into the cries of wounded animals, and the gentle rub of rope against his skin into fire. Phantom fingers brushed over him, dipping into wounds. He let out a small groan, chewing on the bit for some stimulation that wasn't conjured up in his mind. Will shifted against the restraints as his skin turned into thousands of pin pricks. Visions flashed in his head of what might be done to him, too quickly to latch on to but enough to make him twitch.

Sweat ran down his spine. His breathing was hard, erratic, and he wanted to split his skin open on the ropes to release the swarm of monsters crawling at his insides. In his mind, Will speared his legs with great fishing harpoons, and considered tilting his head up and thrusting one down his throat and out between his legs.

"Hannibal," Will gasped, chaffing himself against the ropes. Was Hannibal even still there? How much time had passed? His jaw was on fire from chewing the bit.

Hannibal moved so quickly. Will barely registered the tug on the rope handle above his spine before he was flying through the air, crashing and rolling on the carpet. Adrenaline coursed through Will, and he struggled to get off his side. Then Hannibal slammed into him, pinning him completely. The breath was knocked out of him, and he gaped at the bit like a fish out of water. Though Will was blind, his brain was working in overtime, and he could see Hannibal's movement, the deadly grace of his muscles, the undulations of black tar oozing from his seams.

Hannibal was hard against the outside of Will's leg, and Will felt hot knots coil behind his groin. Hannibal breathed against his shoulder, and Will felt his smile before he bit into flesh.

Will cried out, wiggling against Hannibal's weight in a futile attempt to get away. Hannibal hauled him up like he weighed nothing and sat him in his lap, knees tilted up. "You're beautiful when you're tied up for me," Hannibal growled into Will's neck, fingers rubbing over his nipples. "It took all my self control to keep my hands off you."

Hannibal pinched his nipples and Will cried out from the pain. He was treating him roughly, scratching the sensitive raised nubs. Will could feel his erection rubbing against the small of Will's back. Fear flooded Will, cold and sharp. "H-hurts!" he gasped.

Hannibal dug his fingers into the flesh of Will's pectorals and Will felt them like claws digging deep. "But you want me to hurt you, Will," Hannibal said, his voice guttural. One hand still at his nipple, Hannibal ran his hand down the ropes entwining Will's chest and grabbed his erection through the fabric of his boxers, tugging suddenly. The noise Will made was not human. Cold shocked through his body. His mind screamed at him. *Run*. Will rocked back into Hannibal and then threw himself forward with all the strength he could muster. *Run*. Hannibal moved with him, pinning him down with a forearm across his back. Will's head thudded against the carpet -- his arms were pressed uncomfortably against his sternum and his ass was in the air. "Fuck--" a high, choked curse.

He felt Hannibal's hand on the back of his neck. The length of his erection pressed between his ass cheeks. Will was half screaming, half groaning with each exhale, and he was approaching hyperventilation. The fear pierced him in the shape of antlers impaling him from behind.

Hannibal grabbed him again, pumping slowly. Though the fabric was soft, his grip was relentless, and the dry friction was overwhelming. Will pushed the bit from his mouth and tried to regain his breath; without it he would have no strength to get away. But as he breathed sharply through his nose, he heard the snort of the stag. "No," Will gasped. His voice sounded weak. "God, stop, stop."

Hannibal's words spilled over him like blood and hot tar. "My dear Will. If you truly didn't want this, you would end it." His hand fisted in Will's hair. "You want to be defiled. You want to be ruined. You want this helplessness."

Will felt tight all over, like he was being crushed into his own body. Waves of cold and heat crashed over him, blinding white. He felt sick. His arousal was like a distant mirage floating on the horizon of his consciousness. He could end this. If he spoke the safe word, it would be over. But the fear was an animal caged in his ribs, scratching him from the inside out, shrieking for release.

With a reserve of strength he wasn't aware he possessed, Will writhed against Hannibal, thrashing his body in a desperate attempt to get free. He pushed up from the ground with his tied forearms, coiled his thighs to his chest, and bucked, kicking backwards. His range of motion with his legs was extremely limited, and Hannibal was still flush against his backside. But he had some leverage with his arms. Maybe Hannibal had given him that on purpose. He threw himself forward.

Hannibal released his hair and grabbed the rope over his spine. He wrapped his other arm around Will's waist, trying to get him back into place. Will knew he couldn't get away, but he could make it hard enough to deter Hannibal's cruel hands. He curled his spine then extended it, snapping his hips back and forth, trying to get purchase with his feet so he could push harder. Hannibal grunted, and yanked at the rope in his hand. Will felt it shudder through his body. Hannibal lifted him a few inches from the floor and slammed him down. Will was stunned. It was only a moment, but it was all Hannibal needed: he nudged Will's legs apart, and put his weight on his lower back.

The strain was immediate and burning. His inner thighs, right by his groin, were screaming in pain. His naval was nearly touching the carpet. Hannibal lay flush against him. Will couldn't buck his hips, and didn't have the strength to push up on his arms with Hannibal's weight on him. He gasped, a high, whining sound. Trapped.

Hannibal shifted upwards, relieving some of the weight from Will's pelvis, and slid his arm around Will's neck. With the other, he propped himself up. Will could hear him breathing heavily. The drag of his cock against him was slow and terrifying.

Will was spent. The strain in his hips seemed to fill his entire body. "Help," Will painted, cheek pressed into the rug. "I can't... take much more."

Hannibal mouthed at his exposed ear, sucking at the rim of the shell. "You can and you will."

Will sobbed dryly. Every roll of Hannibal's hips brought him deeper into the torturous stretch. His cock hung down barely enough to touch the carpet, and that slight sensation would probably be the death of him. Hannibal bit him on the shoulder, and Will knew he was mirroring the marks on his chest. His cries of pain were stunted, pathetic noises. "Just fuck me already and get it over with," he snarled.

Hannibal tensed. Will went cold with fear. With ruthless strength, Hannibal flipped him on his back and sat on his lap. Will's lower back spasmed with pain. Hannibal held Will's tied arms flush to his own abdomen, and removed the bit from its purchase on his chin.

Hannibal slapped him, hard, and Will saw stars. The sharp sound reverberated in his head. Hannibal slapped him, backhand on the other cheek, and again, and again. Will didn't have time to process the stinging pain before the next blow landed, and he was overwhelmed in seconds. Will started to cry, real tears this time. The blows stopped, but he couldn't stop crying. He was barely aware of Hannibal getting off him.

He was trembling violently, choking on his tears. The antlers dissolved in him, wisps of black that retreated to the corners of Will's mind. The sound of the stag's hoofs grew distant. Hannibal lifted his hips and slid a pillow underneath, leveling his lower back. The blindfold came off, and Will saw the soft red of his eyelids, but couldn't open his eyes yet. Hannibal smoothed his hair slowly, running the pads of his fingers over Will's scalp, speaking to him in another language. Will had no idea what he was saying, but his voice was soothing.

Will cried until he couldn't cry anymore. Hannibal pressed gentle kisses to the corner of his lips. Will opened his mouth in response and Hannibal kissed him properly, slow and wet, tracing both lips with his tongue and sucking on them as if they were something to be savored. Will's mouth was exhausted from the bit, but he made small sounds of encouragement as Hannibal kissed him. His chest grew tight.

"Do you want me to untie your restraints?" Hannibal asked, and Will shook his head, making a small noise of protest. Hannibal kissed him again.

Where there was cruelty before, there was now tenderness. Hannibal left a trail of wet kisses down Will's neck, inhaling his scent with obvious pleasure. He traced the raised flesh around the ropes with tongue and fingers. At Will's nipples he licked broad strokes with the flat of his tongue, and it was like a salve. Will felt the wounds closing up under Hannibal's mouth. By the time Hannibal had traced every line of rope with his mouth, Will was warm and loose.

Hannibal moaned with obvious pleasure as he sucked at Will's hip bone. He ran his hands up and down Will's bent legs, putting him back together. He massaged the inside of Will's thighs, the muscle incredibly sore. There was some pain as Hannibal worked the knots in his muscles, but Will relaxed into it, absorbed in the sensation of Hannibal's hands on his thighs. Running up and down

his inseam. Massaging his tensor fascia latae and gluteus. Thumbs dipping underneath the fabric of his underwear.

"Aahhhh," Will breathed heavy, rolling his spine. He was fully hard now, not the confused and forced erection from earlier. Hannibal pressed his mouth and nose into the soft flesh inside Will's iliac cress and inhaled with a hungry growl. He nudged the fabric of Will's boxers up and breathed hotly on his skin. Will moaned, feeling Hannibal's desire pool as molten gold in his pelvis. "Ah, god."

Hannibal mouthed at him through his boxers and Will jolted. "God, fuck, Hannibal--" his name a desperate whine on Will's lips. “Yes, god — yes.” Hannibal responded with another groan, and wrapped his lips around Will, no teeth, just pressure that promised more. His mouth was obscenely wet, like he had been the one gnawing at a bit, and after a minute of gentle ministrations Will could feel his boxers grow wet with saliva and precome.

"Oh my god," Will breathed. "Hannibal -- ahhh -- please." He could feel the strength of Hannibal's tongue through the fabric, flicking the small dent beneath his head. Will had barely enough strength to move, but he rocked his hips gently in encouragement nonetheless.

Hannibal flicked his eyes up, but Will's eyes were only half open, blurred with tears, his face half obscured by his bound arms. Hannibal slipped his cock free from the slit in fabric, pressing down at the base and nosing up the side. Will's smell was intoxicating. Hannibal gathered spit and then licked up the underside with the flat of his tongue, basking in the mewling cries emerging from Will. He memorized the shape of Will with his mouth before taking him in, lazy and languid, precise tongue tip, hungry lips, utterly salacious. And equally, Will catalogued the feel of Hannibal’s mouth: his broad lips and long tongue.

When Hannibal took him in his mouth, Will felt the heat through his entire body. His eyes shot open — the ornamented ceiling blurred — and he jerked his hips automatically. He was punished for that with a sharp twinge in his lower back. Hannibal’s mouth was searing, tight, surging. “Oh my god, god,” Will gasped. “I’m not — fuck — going to last long like this.”

But Will’s body was exhausted, and Hannibal was determined to draw him out as long as possible. Will got close to the edge multiple times, but Hannibal would relent, somehow drawing more pleasure from him. Will couldn’t care about the pathetic sounds he was making, high and wounded, desperate, utterly out of his control. He could barely hear the noises he made over the rush of blood in his head. When Will finally tipped over the edge, it was like he was spilling out his entire self, emptied out into warm white light.

When Will could be aware of his surroundings again, Hannibal was almost finished unwrapping his legs. The rope marks were precise indentations, slightly red. If anyone saw them, there would be no hiding what they were from. “Sorry, can’t stop shaking,” Will muttered as Hannibal slowly extended his legs.

“Quite alright,” Hannibal replied, checking his legs over. Will lifted his head slightly to get a better look. It was completely unfair that Hannibal was still dressed, but Will saw the hints of disarray: his tussled hair, the flush to his cheeks and lips, the missing button of his vest, the sweat on his dark shirt. It wasn’t like he was completely composed. Will saw the hints of lust and satisfaction in Hannibal’s features, even as he clinically freed Will from the bonds. He was still hard.

Will stared for a moment, flashing back to the feel of Hannibal against him. He worked his mouth. “Do you want some help with that?”

Hannibal paused, looking at Will. “Please don’t concern yourself,” he replied, moving on to Will’s arms. “I am extremely satisfied with our evening’s activities.”

Will raised his eyebrows. “For some definitions of satisfied.”

Hannibal ignored him, undoing the knots, and unwrapping Will’s forearms. Will could almost hear the rope as it separated from his flesh. When he was freed, he stretched his arms experimentally, but he could barely lift them. Hannibal got an arm underneath him and helped him to a sitting position. He began to remove the diamond harness from Will’s chest.

“You don’t want to?” Will asked, incredulously.

“I’ve already exhausted you,” Hannibal explained, pausing as he went to admire the marks, old and new. “And I need to remove my knot work.”

“Mmm.” Will was exhausted. He felt vaguely like he was asleep — not a waking nightmare, but a soft, floating feeling that encased him. “Then after?”

Hannibal said nothing. Will let him finish his work. Will curled forward, stretching his back carefully while Hannibal coiled the rope around palm and elbow. Will touched the rope marks. He tried to get up on his own, but his lower back spasmed again. He cursed under his breath.

Hannibal was at his side in a moment. “Allow me.” He helped Will stand, shakily. Will leaned into him more than was strictly necessary.

“I brought a toothbrush this time,” Will said with a weak grin. “Can I get a whiskey with my water?”

“Uisce beatha*,” Hannibal said. “The water of life.”

“Is that Gaelic?” Will asked. They headed upstairs slowly.

Hannibal nodded. “I’m not fluent. It’s a beautiful language, but a dying one.”

“Aqua vitae.”

Hannibal made a low, pleased noise. "Uisukī wa, utsukushī josei no yō ni, kansha o yōkyū shimasu. Anata wa sore o nomu jikan, saisho no shisen.’”**

"I don't know Japanese either," Will said sardonically. They arrived at Hannibal's bedroom, and Hannibal guided him to lie down.

“‘Whiskey, like a beautiful woman, demands appreciation. You gaze first, then it’s time to drink.’” Hannibal finished the translation with a smile.

“Murakami,” Will said, amusement growing. “Didn’t expect you to be a fan.”

“I may be particular with my tastes, but I am always looking to broaden my palette.”

“‘The light music of whiskey falling into glasses made an agreeable interlude.’”

Hannibal smiled. “James Joyce. I’ll fetch our drinks.”

Will tried to stay awake while Hannibal retreated downstairs. He stretched his muscles lazily. He would definitely be feeling this for days, but he found that comforting. The relief in the wake of their ‘evening activities’ was immense. His mind was settled.

Hannibal returned with a tray holding a pitcher of water, two tall glasses and one tumbler, a bottle of whiskey, and a cup of tea. An impeccable host as always. “I thought I would offer you something to help you sleep peacefully,” Hannibal explained as he rested the tray on the bedside table. “The tea is a blend that helps one relax and sleep through the night. I can’t promise a dreamless night, but it may help.” He poured the water.

“Thanks,” Will said, accepting the glass. “Can’t hurt. Usually I just stick with whiskey.”

Hannibal took a few gulps of water. “I’ll join you in a moment.” Hannibal strode over to the walk-in closet, removed his vest, and hung it. Will watched as Hannibal stripped off his sweaty dress shirt, marveling in muscles of his back, and calculating Hannibal’s motivations. He wasn’t trying to seduce Will, wouldn’t need to this way (although Will was certainly enjoying this). Maybe it was to put Will at ease, either by remaining in proximity or making him feel at home with Hannibal. He could be letting Will know that he was welcome here, and that certain privacies didn’t apply to him.

Sock garters? Those shouldn’t look good on Hannibal, but then again, neither should some of the patterned suits he wore. Hannibal slipped the clothes into a dry cleaner's bag, standing there in his black silken briefs. No, that wasn’t the entirety of Hannibal’s motivation. Hannibal wanted to remind Will of his physical strength, and the severity of his mental fortress. Nudity meant nothing to Hannibal. His skin was his armor. Hannibal put on a robe, and Will saw how it hid the intimidating strength of his body.

Will drank his water quickly, as Hannibal returned to him. He poured Will’s whiskey before sitting on the edge of the bed with his own glass of water. “How are you feeling?” Hannibal asked.

“Good,” Will replied. “Really amazing, actually. My lower back hurts like hell, and I keep feeling a twinge there. Think I might have caused some damage when I was trashing around.”

“Yes, I wasn’t expecting you to fight that fiercely.”

Will set his water down and took up the whiskey. He could hear the slight pride in Hannibal’s voice. “Yeah. A lot of this, I didn’t expect.”

“I’ll give you a massage,” Hannibal said. “Lie on your stomach.”

Will tried the whiskey. It was good. Really good. He squinted at Hannibal. “You’ve already done so much.” He let ‘for me’ remain unsaid.

“I don’t want to cause any lingering damage,” Hannibal said plainly. “I was rough with you. A few adjustments now could save you weeks of muscle aches.”

“I might fall asleep,” Will warned. He took another sip, enjoying the bright, clear warmth in his mouth. Hannibal was stroking his shin idly, admiring the rope marks there. There was affection in his features, a softness around the mouth and tilt of the head. Nothing others would pick up on, but Will was starting to be able to read Hannibal. The affection was coupled with the solid barriers of Hannibal's fortress, and he felt distant, unknowable. After all, Hannibal wasn't the one who had been cracked open and spilled out on the carpet of the lounge.

Will put his tumbler down and rolled over on his stomach, arms extended by his sides. He heard Hannibal finish his water and the clink of glass as he set it down, then Hannibal was kneeling over his thighs. His hands were firm and decisive, warming the muscles of Will's back with broad strokes and then feeling for knots and inflammation.

"You're good at this," Will mumbled into the pillow as Hannibal worked a knot under his shoulder blade. "Though I can't think of anything you wouldn't be good at."

"And I can't imagine you seeing a massage therapist, so your judgement may be generous." Hannibal pressed the blade of his hands on either side of Will's spine, working the knotted muscle.

Will hummed in contentment. "May be generous?" he mumbled.

Hannibal put him back together with his hands, finding coils of stress and unwinding them. Will sunk into the bed, feeling warm and loose and cared for. Hannibal spent extra time with Will's lower back and pelvis, where parts were inflamed and sprained from forcing Will into that deep stretch. Will made small noises of relief, and occasionally pain as Hannibal kneaded a particularly sore knot.

"Did you mean what you said?" Will muttered. "About it taking all your self control to keep your hands off me?"

Hannibal rubbed gently at the sides of Will's hip. "No," he replied carefully. "I was nowhere near my limit of self control. I acted in a way that I thought would provoke the desired outcome."

"Acted." Will wasn't disappointed, exactly. He was relieved to know that Hannibal had been in control of the entire scene. And yet, it left something wanting.

"Exaggerated latent desires and the ways I would indulge them." Hannibal ran his hands down Will's ass to hold the very top of the thighs. "I did want to touch you. I could have simply touched you for hours, but then I would not have been able to break you. And you broke exquisitely. I could smell your fear."

Will flushed at the words. Hannibal massaged his inner thighs, and Will felt a spark of pleasure. "I thought it was a bit of an act," Will replied. "But you do have something waiting to be unleashed behind all that control."

His hands paused on Will's thighs. "Don't we all?" Hannibal said quietly, hands resuming their work.

Will began to drift into a warm, sunken state on the edge of sleep, free from the swarming thoughts, no razor wire so bright it cold cut, no sprouting antlers. His mind was filled with the touch of Hannibal's hands, which held him barely on the side of consciousness. Will was entirely limp when Hannibal finished the massage. He sat Will up again and got him to drink more water, and then the tea. Tears burned under his eyes as Will realized that no one had ever taken care of him like this.

*pronounced “ishka wah” (basically)

** I couldn’t find the original japanese, so this may not be a direct quote from the book Hard Boiled Wonderland. sorry!

Puppeteer

Chapter Summary

“He doesn’t need to touch them to kill them,” Will mused. “He just made arrangements. Pulled strings. Created a reality in which their deaths were inevitable.”

“What sort of puppeteer designs the deaths of man?”

Blood running down fishing line, making it visible. A three-dimensional drawing in blood. Casting the lure and waiting for the inevitable catch to take the bait and be hauled in. “A god,” Will said.

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Another Marionette Murder gets stuck in Will's head. Will makes himself a puppet. Hannibal feeds him by hand. They mirror each other.

Chapter Notes

this chapter was getting longer than the last so I split it in two.

thanks for the comments and kudos! they're motivating me to keep at it steadily. say hi on tumblr

cw: discussion of self-harm. I want to be clear here that Will is (off-screen) self-harming as a "release" of tension, and Hannibal is encouraging some of it. this is not your mental health how-to guide. self harm is a bad coping mechanism. I will give a cw when there is on screen habitual self harm.

“You were right, Will,” Beverly said with mild annoyance. “This is definitely more elaborate.”

The installation at the center of the warehouse was a tangle of metal cables, pulleys, and winches. Among the smells of concrete, dust, and rust was the rot of death. Two bodies hung above him, contorted, bound, and cut; flies caught in the web. As Will took in the puzzle of lines and weights, the shape of the design was already forming in his mind. “It’s a scale,” he said.

“Alright, clear the area!” Jack ordered as Will approached the scene. The two bodies hung at least twenty feet in the air, pulled so taught they almost seemed alive.

Will closed his eyes. Cleared his mind of all distractions. A pendulum swinging in the dark. When he opened his eyes it was with a shudder of power. Slowly, he traced each cable from its place tied to the victims, wrapped around L beams and hooks, woven around other threads, secured to weights or winches. His mind delighted in the intricacy. It took time to dissect the web and understand what the killer did first. It was not only elaborate, it was excessively so: redundancies and contradictions that disguised the underlying purpose.

The two bodies were both male, one barely an adult, the other well into middle age. They had not been posed, exactly, but the nature of the web guided their bodies into their resting positions, contorted and stretched. The young male had his hands and feet tied together behind him and his body made a gruesome arc; the older man was the opposite, folded in half. Blood dripped up from the warehouse floor to well at the seams of the cords.

"I have spent weeks planning for this moment," Will said in the corridors of his mind. "Experimenting, calculating physics, making models of my masterpiece. I know exactly how much my victims weigh."

The tangle unravels before him: the young male lowered slowly, unbending into a resting pose, the older male swinging, tugged violently. Will wrapped chords and pulled levers, noting with surprise how physically easy this task actually was once everything was in place. "The youth is dead before I begin, lying almost peacefully on his slab. He is at peace. I am mourning him." Will brushes the youth's hair back over his cold forehead.

"The other man is alive for this. He gets to suffer. My pleasure lies not in his pain, but in the perfect execution of my trap: by releasing one weight and elevating the youth, the other is destroyed." Lines zipping past each other, whipping through the air, sprays of blood. "The cuts to his inner thighs are what kills him. The cables cut to his femur."

The man came to a shuddering, deadly stop. Blood dripped down his arms and legs, pooling in the floor below. Satisfaction swelled in Will. "A heart weighed against a feather," he said. "This is my justice. This is my design."

He let the world come back to him in waves. Will returned to himself with a snap of lines pulled taught. He opened his eyes. "You're not going to like this, Jack," Will said as he rubbed his eyes.

"What won't I like?" Jack said as he returned to Will's side.

Will glanced at him and forced the smile off his face. "It's going to be extremely difficult to take apart this crime scene without destroying the bodies."

Jack took a deep breath. "Explain."

Will gestured to the knotted web before them. "It's a trap. If you sever the left lateral cord to release that victim, that weight will fall and the L beam will swing out of control. If you unwind the winch there, the older victim will be cut to ribbons. Cut the older victim away, and the other will snap in half." He could imagine it perfectly: the youth cracked in half at the spine, the thin metal cord slicing his abdomen open and releasing his intestines. The killer didn't actually care if the youth's corpse was defiled, if it was done at the FBI's hands.

Jack groaned. "Are you serious?"

"There are half a dozen ways for us to kill ourselves dismantling this scene," Will said, a bit too enthusiastically.

Jack glowered at him. "Well, we'll have to find the one way that doesn't kill us."

"How on earth does someone come up with this shit?" Beverly said.

"It makes sense to him," Will said. "There's a certain simple poetry to it. Threads connect the victims, hand to hand. Like they were embracing. The invisible ties we have to each other, the pressures that pull us toward and away from each other."

In the end, it took all day for the forensics team to retrieve the bodies safely. Jack had Will stay to help diagram the web: 11 different types of cord, 6 weights, 2 winches, and over 10,000 feet of cable in total. They called for bags of sand to take the weight of the victims, secured them to the weight-bearing cables, and cut the bodies free.

Will was holding it together. His mind was completely occupied with the complexity of the web, and the one before it, but as the day drew on and fatigue began, Will felt the cold cut of razor wire against his skin. He stepped out of the warehouse. Took several deep breaths of the cold air.

"You look like you need this." Beverly walked up to him and handed him a cup of coffee.

"Thanks," Will said with a nod, looking at her chin.

She leaned against the wall next to him, eyeing him over. "How you holding up?"

Will drank the coffee gratefully. "Decently," he replied. "He certainly gave me enough to concentrate on."

"Got any more of an idea who this fucker is?" she asked.

"The younger victim will point us in the right direction," Will said with confidence. "He's someone with a connection to the killer, not literally, but figuratively. The killer feels close to him, whether because he identifies with him or sympathizes for him."

"Sympathy?" Beverly sounded incredulous.

Will shrugged. "The killer has passed judgement. Vengeance for the boy, striking balance in an unfair world."

"Sure. What about sympathy for those who have to clean up this mess?"

Will chuckled.

"You sore?"

Will looked at her, questioning. She pointed to his collar, and Will realized he was pressing down on one of the bruises Hannibal left. Will flushed, and took a long sip of coffee. "Yeah, I'm all knots," he said, looking away.

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Will hadn't ever spent so much time at a crime scene. It was well after dark by the time the team was done. He sat in his car and called Hannibal.

"Will," Hannibal answered fondly.

"Hey." Will ran his hand through his hair. "I just got done at a crime scene. Been here since 9:00am. Our Marionette Murderer."

"How are you?"

Will sighed, and fully considered the question for the first time all day. "I'm alright. Exhausted. I know the scene's going to be playing on repeat in my head all night."

"Would you like to come over?"

Will was tempted. "Pretty sure when I get to a flat surface I'm going to go catatonic."

"You could simply spend the night."

"Thanks, but I want to wake up with my dogs. Maybe you could get me a box of that tea though."

He could hear the smile on the other end. "And deprive myself the pleasure of making it for you?"

Will chuckled. "I just need to sleep. Real sleep. But can I see you soon?"

"My evening slot is open tomorrow night," Hannibal said. Then, hearing Will pause, he added, "Or, you could come to my house after work."

"Yeah, that," Will said, smile like an ache.

"Tomorrow it is. Sleep well."

ooooooooooo

Will woke up to the sound of his dogs barking. He was sitting before his desk in his boxers, fly-making equipment before him. The light of morning fell across the tableau of fishing line, pliers, feathers, and magnifying glass. He felt cold with sweat.

When the image before him resolved, Will stared in horror. The fishing line was wrapped around the detritus of his desk in a taut cats-cradle. He had completed two fishing flies already, which were connected to the web -- they were both embedded into the meaty flesh of his palms. Guiding his hands.

Will pulled out the first hook without thinking, panic clawing at him. Blood splurged from the base of his thumb as the hook tore through flesh. He cursed, and the dogs barked louder. Heart fluttering, Will tried to breathe.

Shuddering, mouth full of bile, he pushed the other hook through his skin until the barbed end emerged with a sickening pop. He grabbed his metal cutters and snipped the end off. Hands trembling, he pulled the hook through the wound. Antlers slipping out of flesh.

Will stumbled to the sink and splashed his face with cold water.

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"What happened to your hands?" Zeller asked loudly.

Will had been staring at the dead youth's face, and didn't look up to answer. "My can opener broke," he lied easily, then transitioned immediately to: "Cause of death?"

"Take a guess -- don't think you'll get this one."

"It's poison," Beverly said, arms crossed.

Zeller pouted. "Ruining my fun."

"Poison?" Will was surprised. None of the previous victims had been poisoned. It didn't match the profile they had. "A different means of killing for a different category of victim. What poison?"

"Cyanide."

Will's eyes snagged on the deep wire marks in the man's flesh. "A killing of kindness. Do we know who he is?"

"Marcus Reyes," Jack said as he strode into the morgue. "I just finished speaking with his *friends*. One of them looked at a photo but I'll have him confirm with the body."

Will glanced up at Jack. The way he said 'friends' came with obvious quotation marks, but Will couldn't guess what Jack found unusual about said friends. "Marcus will lead us to the killer. The other -- he doesn't matter, the killer finds those men interchangeable."

Jack smirked. "Why do you say that, Will?" he asked, but Will could tell he was goading him. Jack knew something Will didn't.

"The killer sympathizes with men like Marcus. He gave him a painless death, and then elevated his corpse as art and as a murder weapon for despicable men like our second victim. The killer sees himself in Marcus."

Jack smiled. "Well if that's the case, what do you make of this: Marcus Reyes was a sex worker."

"Interchangeable," Beverly said with a breath of realization. "The other men are Johns."

The two crimes scenes flashed in Will's mind like reflections in the shards of glass of a supremely fucked up mobile: bodies swinging on ropes, hoisted, tugged like puppets; lines of blood connecting hands, thighs, throats; flesh cinched, tied to bursting; a dance; a puppet play; the invisible threads throughout Will's life that contorted him in and out of place. Will rubbed the

stubble of his jaw. "I'll think about that," he said, which drew surprise from the others, so used they were to Will immediately putting the pieces together. "Look again into the other victims; they probably *are* johns. Might be a similar --" *Hunting ground* were the words that came to mind, but that wasn't right. "Client base. Preferences, means of contact."

"Kinky bastard," Price said.

Will went pale. Nearly snapped as he said, "I told you, this isn't about sexual gratification for him."

"Neither is kink necessarily," Beverly said, and then with a smirk, "Maybe we should be canvassing the Baltimore dungeons." Zeller snickered.

"No, no," Will said insistently, pinching the bridge of his nose. Fuck, but his headache was getting worse. He tried to sound confident when he spoke, but was he even sure anymore? "It's not that."

"Then what is it?" Jack asked firmly, somehow impatient and indulgent at the same time.

"I'm not sure," Will admitted, grabbing the bottle of aspirin from his jacket pocket. Jack's eyes narrowed, hawkish, as Will threw the pills back, and Will wondered what it would be like to hold out a handful of painkillers and sleep aids to Jack like an accusation.

ooooooooooo

By the time Will arrived at Hannibal's house his thumbs were aching from gripping the steering wheel, and the headache that had plagued him all day was still throbbing against his skull. Pain was a familiar companion, but doubt was not. His intuitions were honed to a sharp blade, and although he may get lost in the bramble of others minds, he always could cut himself free. Not so with Garett Jacob Hobs, who months later was still embedded in Will like barbed shrapnel, whose reflection caught the light only at certain angles. Not the Marionette Murderer, who inspired Will to make a puppet of himself. Was he projecting himself, or reflecting something that was actually there?

Will dragged himself to Hannibal's front steps and rang the bell. Hannibal greeted him with a conspiratorial smile that was beginning to feel familiar. He was devastatingly handsome; he always had been, but now Will allowed himself to appreciate it. The elegant cut of his custom-tailored suit accentuated his broad and muscular form while imbuing it with a delicate edge of beauty. The impossibly polished angles of his face were almost inhuman in their artistry. Will felt his smile grow as he looked -- enjoyed looking -- permitting himself. Hannibal too looked over Will's face with dark eyes, and over his body (fuck).

"I was delayed at the office," Hannibal said, stepping aside for Will to enter, but only slightly, and Will felt the proximity of their bodies like a heat. "So I haven't started dinner yet."

"No problem," Will replied, shedding his coat and hanging it up. When he turned, Hannibal had shut the door, and was looking at Will's hands, no longer hidden in his pockets. Hannibal took Will's bandaged hands in his own, smile tightening into a pursed look of disapproval. He ran his thumbs over Will's knuckles.

"Perhaps I should tend to this first." Hannibal looked up at Will, expectant.

Will knew he couldn't pass the same excuse off on Hannibal, but he didn't want to admit that he had woken up to a miniature model of the Marionette Murderer's design. A compromise, then. "I needed a release," Will said with a shrug.

Hannibal raised Will's hands and kissed one after another. Maybe Will just needed that: an excuse to take Hannibal's comfort. Self-harming in his sleep was bad, but maybe not as bad as harming himself on purpose so that Hannibal could heal the wounds.

"Come." Hannibal escorted him to the kitchen with a hand on the small of his back, and sat Will down. It was the same chair Will had occupied when Hannibal bandaged his legs. Hannibal knelt before him again, which was entirely unnecessary to gain access to Will's palms. But Will enjoyed looking down at Hannibal. The gesture spoke of devotion. Hannibal removed the bandages and inspected the wounds. They were red and aching from repeatedly reopening.

"A fishing hook, Will?" Hannibal raised his eyes.

Of course he would recognize the wound for what it was. Will shrugged.

Hannibal began to treat the wounds, cleaning them with a sharp, stinging alcohol. "This self mutilation is purposeful," Hannibal said. "Symmetrical, in a visible place and one that is extremely inconvenient and difficult to heal. Did you wish to be reminded throughout the day of the pain your hands could cause?"

"Something like that," Will said.

"Will." Of course Hannibal wasn't satisfied with just that.

Will sighed. "It was stupid. I couldn't get the crime scene out of my head, so I tried to distract myself by working on my lures. I don't know what I wanted from it, and I regret doing it. It's been annoying me all day."

Hannibal reapplied fresh bandages. "And what do you want now?"

Will took his free hand and caressed the bony arch of Hannibal's cheekbone, sweeping his thumb across the severe plane of his brow. Hannibal tilted his head up permissively. Will leaned forward, cupping Hannibal's chin to guide his face exactly where he wanted it, and kissed him. Breathless. Their lips molded softly together, but Will felt the strain of need thrum deep within, like he was starving and Hannibal's taste was bringing his hunger to life. Will shuddered as Hannibal opened up to him, flicking his tongue over the sharp points of Will's teeth. Impossible that their chemistry could be this intense -- electric -- a word Will had always thought was a fantastic exaggeration, but that was exactly how it felt. Will moaned, unembarrassed, and sucked at Hannibal's lip.

Hannibal was indulgent, settling between Will's legs and running his hands over his thighs. Will took what he wanted from the kiss, his greed apparent. Gradually he let Hannibal go, placing lingering kisses on his lips, feeling his hands clench his thighs possessively. Their foreheads rested together, breaths mingling. When Will leaned back, it was with satisfaction to see Hannibal looking flushed and mildly disheveled. Pupils blown wide. Lips stretching over teeth. Hungry as well.

"You kiss better than you lie," Hannibal said in a thick voice.

Will raised his eyebrows. "I'm very good at lying."

"I don't disagree." Hannibal finished bandaging Will's other palm and stood up. "A testament to your ability to kiss."

Will shook his head with a wry smile. "I'm not great with compliments."

"I adore the way you respond to compliments." Hannibal removed his suit jacket in a fluid motion and hung it on the back of the chair. He rolled up his sleeves and donned an apron, and Will began to salivate, not exactly at the thought of food. "You're so unaccustomed to receiving them that, though you're desperate for praise, you deflect with self-deprivation as if on queue. Protecting yourself from false appreciation and, as always, from what you want."

"I'm not desperate for praise," Will complained, though he was still smiling.

"Oh?" A quirk of his smile. "Am I misidentifying one desperation for another?"

"I'm desperate for a drink."

Hannibal poured them both wine. "You find compliments to be false. Either given with expectation of reciprocity or an emotional response you feel uninterested in performing. You have little regard for your physical beauty, and compliments on your form fall on deaf ears. As for your brilliance, compliments are just a step away from insistent curiosity, which you fear you will mistake for genuine compassion. No one truly understands how it is you do what you do, so their praise hardly comes from a place of authority." He handed Will a glass of wine.

"I'm not going to deny that," Will said as he took the glass, though the words *physical beauty* rang in his ears. "I don't value complements, and therefore, I am not desperate for them."

"You are for my praise." Hannibal swirled the dark red wine, looking down over the edge of the glass.

Will laughed, incredulous. "Dr. Lecter, your ego is showing."

Hannibal raised his eyebrows (or lack thereof). "I know you, Will," he said in a low voice. "I am a source of stability in your life, and you live with many uncertainties. Furthermore, you know I would not give you false praise, and that I offer my praise very sparingly."

Will sipped his wine. What he was desperate for was a good fuck and a better night's rest. Still, Hannibal's praise had made his stomach turn. He scrunched up his face, half smiling and mocking. "You think I'm beautiful?"

Hannibal's face went blank. "Did I not just say so? There's no need to fish."

Will flushed, chuckling at the word play. "You... always speak with poetic embellishment."

Hannibal strode around the counter, and began to assemble the ingredients for dinner. "Trust me Will," he said, kitchen knife poised and gleaming. "I haven't even begun to wax poetic about your beauty."

The sound of Hannibal chopping at the board mingled with the blood in Will's ears, and he stared into the wine in his glass, deep red punctured with soft light. *Your beauty*. It felt odd to hold those words in his mind amongst the cables and cadavers, and to do so made his chest ache slightly. Surely Hannibal didn't mean beauty in any photogenic sense; he was too ragged to be pleasurable

to look at, always fidgeting and twitching. Objectively Will could identify some of his features as handsome, though lately he couldn't see himself correctly in the mirror. The features wouldn't add up. No, if Hannibal saw beauty in him, it was the beauty of a well executed and murderous design.

Will would be beautiful tied in razor wire, bleeding and debauched for Hannibal. He could see it perfectly: the red blood leaking down his pale skin, his fleeting and pained lucidity, the ghastly halo of the dying making something angelic of his features. Ridiculous to fantasize about that. Ridiculous to hear the word 'beauty' and think about Hannibal watching him bleed to death. But Will wanted Hannibal to see his monstrous underbelly and accept it, and the only way he could imagine that acceptance was through the amoral eye of beauty.

"The crime scene is so thoroughly embedded in my head that I feel like every thought is a snapshot from it," Will said. "Now I'm watching you cook, but every movement you make is drawn by metal cables. Like it's been transplanted in my brain and now my thoughts are firing along blood soaked lines."

Hannibal glanced up at him, but hardly slowed his work at the stove. "Tell me about the scene."

"Oh, god. Hannibal, it was... incredibly intricate. Insanely so. Like a supremely fucked up murderous Rube Goldberg Machine." Will saw the path of all the cables behind his eyes, shuddering as if everything had just fallen into place. "There were two victims. The second was just like the others: a middle aged man, nothing remarkable. But the first victim, the one who died first in this design, was young and —" Beautiful was the word that came to mind, as Will remembered the deep wire cuts in the youth's skin. "The killer designed the contraption so that when the first victim was elevated, the second victim was hurled violently through the trap and tangled and cut. He made them a scale. Condemning one, making the other a martyr."

Will drank from his wine. Whatever Hannibal was cooking smelled delicious, and Will realized how hungry he'd been all day. "He poisoned the first victim. He thought it was merciful. He -- that victim was a sex worker. The others are clients. The killer is a sex worker too. At least, I think. I can't extricate myself from the picture. There's something sexual about the display, but maybe I'm just. Projecting. My own fucked up fantasies."

"Do you find these killings erotic?"

Will laughed. "Oh god, yes. Don't you dare tell Jack, I'll be institutionalized in a second."

"Yet you think this is your own reaction, and not part of the killer's mentality."

Will leaned back in his chair, watching Hannibal cook. "There are none of the usual signs. No indication of sexual assault, no mutilation of the genitals or mouth."

"But one of the latest victims was a sex worker."

"Sex as subject matter, not motivation."

Hannibal crushed herbs over the pan, moving deftly, entirely in his domain. For a moment Will was distracted by the grace of his movements. Orchestrating. "You are getting lost in the complexity," Hannibal observed. "Tangled up in the web instead of seeing it clearly from the outside. Let's go back to the beginning. What does the killer feel while he kills?"

Everything is in place. The threads are set, the weights released, and my web snaps tight and deadly. The cords hum with the vibration. "Satisfaction," Will said slowly. "Like an artist fully realizing their creation. Everything went according to plan. It's detached. Dispassionate."

"A passionate killer would want to feel the violence under their own hands," Hannibal said. "This killer works indirectly."

"He doesn't need to touch them to kill them," Will mused. "He just made arrangements. Pulled strings. Created a reality in which their deaths were inevitable."

"What sort of puppeteer designs the deaths of man?"

Blood running down fishing line, making it visible. A three-dimensional drawing in blood. Casting the lure and waiting for the inevitable catch to take the bait and be hauled in. "A god," Will said.

"Indeed."

"A god is above human lusts," Will said, feeling the killer's venomous distaste. "How dare they seek such base gratification from a god. Their desires make them weak, pathetic. They try to pull strings to manipulate him into the shape of their desires. But he's cut his own strings, and sees the ones pulling everyone else. Lust, expectation, society's sexualization of bodies."

"The victims' sexuality is the subject, not the sexuality of the killer."

"Exactly."

"Why did he kill the sex worker?"

Will didn't reply at first. He drained his wine glass and set it on the table, fingers idly stroking the stem. "An act of mercy. Not because he was a sex worker, but because he suffered some indignity in the killer's eyes. Because, in some sense, he was already dead."

"The same indignity the killer suffered."

"Maybe," Will replied. "Before he died and became a god."

Hannibal served them osso buco veal shanks with aromatic onions and carrots and gremolada. "A simple meal with simple ingredients," Hannibal confessed, "but one that results in a superb flavor. The bone marrow transforms the dish." Will savored each bite and felt the combination of savory and sharp flavors breathe life into his dull and aching body. Felt too, the obvious way Hannibal enjoyed watching his enjoyment of the meal.

"If you think this is simple, I'd hate to hear what you call my usual fare," Will said. "Uncivilized. A gastronomic monstrosity."

"It pains me to see you underfed," Hannibal said in his smooth, level voice, without a trace of said pain. "I will take every opportunity to give you the delicacies you deserve."

"The finer things are wasted on me. My palette has been tempered with canned beans and white bread."

Hannibal's nose pinched, as if the mere names of such lesser foods were an unappealing scent. "Don't be cruel, Will, or I might have to drop in uninvited and cook your daily meals."

Will laughed. "Don't subject yourself to the state of my kitchen. I don't think you'd ever invite me back if you saw what's in my pantry."

Hannibal smiled wryly, slicing himself a bite of veal. He closed his eyes as he chewed, transported momentarily to someplace Will couldn't follow. Satisfaction, Will thought. The flavors coming together as planned. Will ate more clumsily, and dropped his fork as the wound in his palm pinched in pain, the clatter of silver on china disrupting the elegant scene. Hannibal's eyes snapped open. "Sorry," Will muttered.

Hannibal dabbed his mouth with the corner of his napkin, and folded it onto the table. He stood with a hand on his sternum. Will put down his utensils, watching Hannibal with mounting dread. Hannibal grabbed the wine bottle and walked behind Will's chair, bending close to him as he refilled his glass. Hannibal's face was right by his ear, so Will heard clearly the intake of breath as Hannibal smelled him. Will flushed. "Don't you dare," Will said.

Hannibal smoothed his hands down Will's arms, and took up his knife and fork, and the *motherfucker* began to cut his veal for him. Will stiffened. He clenched his hands in his lap, pain shooting through his palm. "That's really not—" he began to say, and then Hannibal's lips were right by his ear.

"Your etiquette is appalling," Hannibal said with soft amusement. "Need I do everything myself?"

"This is mortifying," Will said as Hannibal pierced the flesh with the fork, assembling a perfect bite. His heart fluttered. It wasn't just embarrassing, though. He clenched his hands tighter.

"You know I enjoy feeding you," Hannibal said, dangerously sweet. "Will you deprive me of that enjoyment?"

Hannibal lifted the fork and Will opened his mouth compliantly, eyes fluttering shut as he felt metal on his lip and the mouth-watering anticipatory taste of tender meat. He closed his mouth and took in the food, and Hannibal retracted the fork. Will chewed slowly, deliberately savoring the bite, Hannibal's breath steady by his ear. Somehow he was even more aware of the flavors: the tang of lemon and parsley, the warm and salty flesh that melted in his mouth. He swallowed, the sound compounding his embarrassment. "I don't know if my pride can take another bite."

Hannibal hummed in pleasure, assembling the food on the fork again. Will breathed hard through his nose, and considered refusing him. Then he felt the light trail of Hannibal's fingers on his throat, tilting his head back and finding purchase over his trachea. Will's breath caught. Hannibal fed him another bite, lips brushing his ear. Fuck. Hannibal could hear everything, from his rising heart beat to the wet noises of his mouth and the clack of his teeth chewing. Hannibal pressed his cheek against Will's jaw and felt him eat, felt him swallow with his hand. Will flashed back to being tied to this very table, Hannibal's fingers deep in his mouth, and he finished the bite panting.

"Very good," Hannibal purred. "You take what I give you so well."

Will clenched his jaw. "Kinky about food too, huh? What's next: whipped cream?"

Hannibal chuckled, and fed Will another bite. "Would you like that? I think chocolate would suit you better. I could pour melted chocolate over you and then clean up my mess."

Will swallowed the next bite hard. Hannibal could feel it move down his throat - *Christ*. “You don’t need that excuse to get your mouth all over me,” he said tightly.

“No,” Hannibal agreed. “And I’d rather taste you the way you are, paired with red wine and tender meat.”

Will turned his head away, silently refusing another bite. “You’re making me hungry.”

Hannibal stroked the stubble at his jaw, and brushed his wide lips over Will’s ear. “What will sate your hunger?” he asked in a deep rumbling voice. “Besides my superb cooking?”

Will took a deep breath, and lifted his arms to grab Hannibal’s shoulders, arching his back against the chair. He was arrested momentarily by his embarrassment — *I can think of something else you can feed me.* “I want to touch you,” he said, voice shuddering. Hannibal nuzzled his neck and slid his hands down Will’s chest. Then he smoothly removed himself, straightening, and returning to his seat.

“Finish your meal first,” Hannibal instructed without looking at him.

Will stared. His lips pulled across teeth. *Unbelievable*. Feeding him by hand and ordering him to finish his plate. Hannibal resumed his seat and refocused on his meal, ignoring Will. Will grabbed his wine glass and drank two large gulps — fuck savoring. He pushed himself up from the table, legs of his chair scraping on the floor. Hannibal tilted his head, still just looking at his food, as if he had discovered a new flavor combination. Will walked over and stood behind his chair (*turning the tables*, he thought with a smirk) and smoothed his hands over Hannibal’s shoulders, feeling the expensive fabric and the musculature underneath. For a moment Will wondered if Hannibal would let him, or punish him for his transgression. But Hannibal was undisturbed, and continued to eat his meal slowly.

Will rested his head on the top of Hannibal’s, breathing in deep the smell of his scalp and cologne, which was strangely familiar. He ran a thumb along the collar of Hannibal’s shirt and felt the skin of his neck. He slotted his thumb at the jugular to feel Hannibal’s pulse, steady and strong. “I want to touch you,” he repeated, speaking into Hannibal’s skull. “I want you to come this time. I want to see you — feel it — the moment you let slip a bit of your control.” His heart rate was still steady. Hannibal raised his glass, and Will pressed his ear to Hannibal’s temple so he could hear him swallow down the wine. “I want to impale myself on you, all the ways I can make you a knife, and peel back my skin so you can see the breathing thing inside, the antlers, the razor wire.” Underneath Will’s thumb, he could feel Hannibal’s heart rate increase. Will gave a small moan. “You could fuck me all night but you won’t get inside me,” he hissed. “Not really. But maybe when this is all over you’ll get a look.”

Hannibal’s heart raced under the pad of his thumb. But oh so calmly, he placed his utensils on the edge of his plate, dabbed his mouth with the napkin, and folded it. Will’s own heart was hammering in his chest. Hannibal touched the hand that was at his throat, a gentle caress. Then he grabbed Will’s hand and pressed into the bandaged wound — Will cried out, and, wrist bent back, went to his knees. Hannibal spun around him, adjusting the chair with his free hand, and grabbed him by the hair. Will gasped as he was adjusted, his scalp screaming, and then Hannibal was sitting again, and Will was on his knees before him. Another reflection.

“Congratulations, Will,” Hannibal said, running his hand through Will’s hair. “You’ve succeeded in provoking me. Such little patience.”

“You fed me,” Will said, slow emphasis on each word. “By hand.”

"Which you found provocative." Hannibal smiled.

Will rolled his eyes. He put his hands on Hannibal's legs and sat up on his knees, drawing close. "Are you going to make me ask pretty please?" he mocked, running his hands to the crease of Hannibal's thigh and hips, squeezing.

Hannibal cupped Will's chin. "No." He tilted Will's head to once side and then the other, admiring the cast of light and shadow across his features. With the blade of his thumb and forefinger, he pressed up beneath Will's chin, cutting off his breath. Will stayed still and let the slow constriction wrap him in warm, aching comfort; then he rose as Hannibal bade him and climbed onto his lap. He leaned forward to kiss him, but Hannibal's hand was still at his throat, not pushing hard enough to keep Will away, but making him choke himself on it to get to Hannibal's mouth. The faintest brushing of lips as Will mouth hung heavy. The breath squeezed out of him as he worked his jaw, fluttering weakly against Hannibal's lips. He deigned to raise his chin and kiss Will softly. Will pressed forward to kiss him back and Hannibal felt the top of his trachea slip under his hand with an unmistakable click. With a growl Hannibal licked up into Will's mouth, relishing in its paralytic compliance. Will’s face was lax and his eyes swam with the sensation of being choked and tasted. Will edged back, and Hannibal let his hand go limp against his throat. Will gasped for air and let out a broken moan, coughing.

Will kissed him fervently, wrapping his arms around Hannibal's neck. It was an awkward position in the chair, but worth it to be able to touch so much of Hannibal at once: squeeze his thighs between his own, weight on him, arms down his back. Hannibal undid the top buttons of Will's shirt, caressing the exposed skin. Will arched into his touch. Tasted his lips and tongue and felt the scrape of his teeth. Hannibal pulled the shirt off of Will's shoulders, smoothing the exposed skin.

Will dropped his arms and wrestled off his shirt, gripping Hannibal's shoulders again. He found his mouth again, tasting savagely. Hannibal ran his hand through his hair and tugged back so he could look at his face. "You've kept your bruises well," he muttered.

"They're starting to fade," Will said, licking his lips. "To a dull ache." He moved forward again to kiss him, but Hannibal yanked him back. Will hissed.

"Tell me what really happened with you hands," Hannibal said.

"Oh for fuck's--" Hannibal yanked again.

"Then," Hannibal continued. "We can see about sating your hunger."

Will glared at him, grinning. He rolled his hips forward. "What about... giving me what I desire?"

"What about patience?"

"You think you can hold out..." Will unbuttoned his vest, hands skimming low. "God, I want you inside me."

"I know I can outlast you."

That was probably true. Will slipped his hand between them, feeling the growing arc of Hannibal's cock beneath his trousers. Hannibal let him touch, but kept a fist in Will's curls. "Do you really not

want to tell me, or do you just enjoy being difficult?" Hannibal asked. He ran a hand up Will's ribs, flicking a thumb over his nipple.

Will bit his tongue, smile quivering. He stroked his palm up and down the bulge, reaching as low as he could, and brushing himself on every upstroke. "I think you know the answer to that."

"You are depraved." Hannibal smirked. "Depriving yourself again."

"God, you feel--"

"Tell me, Will." His voice was firm.

Will closed his eyes, brows knitted together. Still, he hesitated. If Hannibal knew he was performing acts of self-destruction in his sleep, and that's surely what it was, not lost time, then -- then. He would see Will becoming unhinged. Didn't he want Hannibal to see? "I don't know why I hurt myself," he said carefully. "I woke up this morning sitting at my desk with my fly fishing equipment and... and. I had been wrapping the line in a cats-cradle. Tied to the lures embedded in my hands." His eyes were still closed.

Hannibal relaxed the grip in his hair, and cupped his face. "Has this happened before?"

Will shook his head, slowly blinking his eyes open and staring at Hannibal's chest. "Thank you for telling me," Hannibal said. He ran his hand down Will's chest, and undid the button of his pants.

"Sated your curiosity?" Will breathed, leaning his head against Hannibal's. Hannibal pressed his thumbs into the soft flesh under Will's waistband and traced the contour of his hips.

"Only wetted it." Hannibal kissed him.

Will pressed up against him, letting Hannibal explore his mouth. He felt the other's hands slip beneath his briefs and over the curve of his ass. Will rocked forward again, gripping the waistband of Hannibal's pants and stroking him with his thumb. Hannibal's hands pressing against the bottom of his spine made him throb, and he set a slow pace grinding in Hannibal's lap. Hannibal bit his lip hard and Will sighed, tipping his head back. Then his mouth was on Will’s neck.

"God," Will whispered. "Feels... good. Ahhn." He moaned softly as Hannibal kissed his neck, the sensation shooting straight down to his groin. Hannibal's fingers stroked lightly between his cheeks, making Will pant. His knees began to shake.

"I always clean up after my meals," Hannibal said against Will's skin. "I detest leaving dirty dishes."

"Oh, fuck that," Will said, pressing hard on Hannibal's cock. "You can't seriously --"

Hannibal grabbed Will's hips and stood from the chair, and Will squeezed onto him with his legs instinctively. It was thrilling how easily Hannibal could move him. Hannibal lowered him until he was standing flush, and kissed him. Will could feel him hard against him and gripped onto him desperately. "I take exceptions with you, Will," Hannibal said between kisses. "Many exceptions. The dishes are condemned to wait."

Will groaned in relief.

Puppet

Chapter Summary

“I want you,” Will panted, weakly touching Hannibal’s knee. “Don’t make me… wait. I don’t know how — how much more I can survive.”

Hannibal kissed his cheek. “My dear Will. You will survive so much more.”

ºoooooooooo

Will undresses Hannibal. A new lead in the Marionette Murder case helps Will put the pieces together.

Chapter Notes

I can't believe I've written 70 pages of this porny, gory monster. next update friday. say hi on tumblr

cw: brief non-consensual touching during sleep

Somehow they made it upstairs to the bedroom, frequently interrupted. Will, trying to keep his mouth on Hannibal’s; Hannibal, guiding Will along, then snapping in a moment of hunger, kissing him hard enough to stun. Will pushed Hannibal against the wall of the bedroom and slid his hands up under his suit jacket. Hannibal shrugged out of it, and held it in one hand. “Hang it up,” Hannibal instructed as Will began to undo the buttons of his shirt.

Will gave a huff of frustration. “Seriously?” His hands slipped on the buttons of Hannibal's shirt.

Hannibal pushed him back with a hand on his collar, and handed him the jacket. Panting, Will searched his face. Lips swollen and flush to his high cheekbones, his lust was obvious and yet he was still so composed. Will felt like a trembling mess in comparison. He backed slowly, and then turned to the walk-in closet. The hairs on the back of his neck stood up, a spark of fear as he turned his back on Hannibal. Will looked over the rows of Hannibal’s suits, finely pressed, ordered by type and color. He let his fingers trail over the expensive fabric. Everything was organized just so, and it was with no difficulty that Will found a suitable place for the jacket. He hung it on an empty hanger.

Turning, Will saw Hannibal undoing his cuff links and loosening his tie. Will stepped forward, and helped Hannibal out of his vest. He found the correct place for it. His hands were trembling as he hung it amongst the others. Hannibal was watching him with severe attention, and Will’s eyes flickered between his and the strip of exposed skin under his unbuttoned shirt. Will pressed up against him, trailing his hands over his chest and the fine, greying hairs there. “God,” Will

breathed, pressing his head against Hannibal's collar, head filled with the smell of him and the feel of his skin. He dug his nails into the firm flesh of his pectorals, and scratched lightly down his ribs.

"No, Will," Hannibal muttered. "No God. Just the two of us."

Will kissed him as he slid the shirt off his shoulders. It took a huge effort to pull away from Hannibal's supple lips, but he turned around anyway. The oxygen he took into his lungs wasn't enough to sustain him, and he breathed hard as he found the hanger, put the shirt on, folded the collar, and did the first three buttons. He smoothed the fine linen, although all he wanted to do was grab the fabric in his fists and tear it to pieces. He felt the fibers catch against his nails, ripping, unraveling, cutting underneath his fingernails. The threads were everywhere, finely woven, blades every one of them.

Hannibal came up behind his trembling and tensed form, wrapping him in his arms. Will removed his hands from the shirt and clawed at his own collar, dragging his nails down his chest hard. He winced, arching against Hannibal. They were tangled together, so many lines of red, how hadn't he seen it before? Little droplets of blood blossomed from the red tracks of his nails. Threads tied from Hannibal's heart to his own, and as he tugged at them, something caught in his bowels. His fingers tangled in the lines. He pulled, hauling in the razor wire rats-nest up with the silken smooth trail of his intestines. He could make puppet strings out of his own bowels. Vaguely, he felt Hannibal kiss his shoulders and take Will's hands in his own, preventing him from clawing his gut open. Will whimpered, sagging against Hannibal. "Fuck, fuck," he cursed weakly.

Hannibal bit his shoulder, not as savagely as before, but the pain was enough to ground Will. He hummed in pleasure, and turned in Hannibal's arms, hands going straight for his belt. He pulled the leather through the clasp and it was like freeing himself from part of the tangled web. His shoulders rose and fell with the labor of his breathing, and he closed his eyes with each intake. Hannibal caressed his arms lightly as Will unzipped him and pressed the trousers off his hips, which caught for a moment on the mast of his erection. Will sagged again, head pressed against Hannibal's sternum. "I'm falling apart," he panted, feeling the threads cutting him up inside.

"Hang it up." His words were cold as ice. Will felt a sob growing in his chest, and clenched the fabric of the pants so hard he could feel the cuts in his hands break open. He sank to his knees, shaking violently as Hannibal stepped out of his clothes. Will watched the muscles of his thighs and thought of powerful metal cables, crushing him so hard his skin split. Will sat there for a moment, trying to regain control over his limbs. He staggered to his feet. He tried to get the belt out of the loops and whined in frustration. He dropped it to the ground, and dragged himself to the hanger that already held the matching suit jacket. Will clipped the pants, and placed the hanger on the rack.

When he turned, Hannibal was staring at the belt on the floor. Will clenched his hands over and over. The air was thick with lines of thread. Will picked up the belt and handed it to Hannibal. Hannibal examined it, running it between his hands, and then examined Will: his compulsive twitching, the unsteady rhythm of his breath, the tension running through his body like taught wire. He looked like he might come undone with the right touch or at the wrong lash out like a cornered animal. Hannibal beckoned him closer and Will was tugged towards him. Hannibal traced the fresh scratches raised on Will's chest, admiring them. He took a small step back, and struck Will's belly with the belt.

Will bent over, clutching his belly as the air hissed out between his teeth. The welt was burning under his fingers. The pain was exquisite, sharp and clear and real. Hannibal took his hand and led

him to the bed. Will laid down on his back, his pupils shot wide. “God, it hurts,” he said, words slurring. “It hurts so much, it never goes away.”

Hannibal stroked his face, smoothing the crease on his brow. “I know,” Hannibal said. “You hardly know how you will go on.” He struck Will again.

Will’s entire body arched up off the bed, and he shoved his palms against his eyes, letting out a ragged cry. Threads snapped. “Please,” Will begged.

The belt cracked against his skin.

“Again.”

Hannibal brought the belt down, and Will nearly leaped off the bed. He cried out, a devastatingly beautiful sound, and curled up on himself. The welts were bright red on his pale skin. Will clutched himself, biting at the air for each breath. Hannibal rolled the belt up and set it on the bedside table. He crawled over Will, turning him onto his back again. His limbs were trembling, and his eyes were half-lidded and dazed. “Beautiful,” Hannibal whispered, tracing the outline of each welt with a finger.

“I want you,” Will panted, weakly touching Hannibal’s knee. “Don’t make me… wait. I don’t know how — how much more I can survive.”

Hannibal kissed his cheek. “My dear Will. You will survive so much more.”

They kissed, wet and pained and desperate. Will quivered under the firm press of Hannibal’s tongue against his, the strong muscles moving together. Hannibal yanked his pants down to his thighs and Will kicked himself free. He ran his hands up and down Hannibal’s back, feeling the strong muscles coil and slide as Hannibal moved between Will’s legs and lowered his hips, dragging along him. They rubbed against each other, Will keening as sparks of arousal jolted through him. He wrapped his ankles around the back of Hannibal’s legs, eager to pull him closer. “So responsive,” Hannibal said with admiration, nipping at Will's lips. "Like you were made to be touched by me."

Will moaned, nails biting into the flesh of Hannibal's shoulders. "Yes," he breathed.

Hannibal flipped them over so Will was straddling him. Will pressed down into him. In this position Hannibal could freely admire the marks on Will's chest: the old, yellowing bite marks, his self induced scratches, and the red welts of the belt. He thought of gutting him like this: the soft o-shape his mouth would make in surprise, the shuddering way he would clutch at Hannibal, blood hot and slippery on his hand, the drag of the knife cutting through the barrier between them. Hannibal thought of slicing an opening between his ribs, cracking the bone to make way for his hand, sliding beneath lungs to grab his heart and feel it pump; to massage his heart and keep Will alive as he bled out, feeding him oxygen with his mouth. He dug his fingers into Will's hips and scooted him higher on his naval. *You could fuck me all night and you wouldn't get inside me,* Will's voice repeated in his mind, smooth and arousing and infuriating. How long until Will let him bleed him, begged Hannibal to cut him. And how he would do it so carefully, drawing out the sensations without putting Will in actual harm. The skin would part like an invitation, and Hannibal would resist licking it, pressing in with his tongue. How close to real danger they would be.

Hannibal growled and yanked Will down to kiss him, desperate with the need to taste him. He bit hard, and the skin of Will's lips broke. Hannibal lapped at his blood, sucking, probing the wound

with his tongue. Will was coming apart in his arms, a trembling, sweaty mess. "My god," Will panted against his mouth, and Hannibal thought *yes*.

Hannibal ran his hands beneath Will's briefs and squeezed his ass hard, kneading the strong muscles. Will rolled his hips, pinned between his hands and his body. Hannibal spread his cheeks and slid a forefinger down. Will gasped and pressed against his finger. "Hannibal--" His name a quivering plea.

"Your skin is just another barrier between us," Hannibal murmured, stroking the ring of muscle. "I would peel it away, sink my hands in you." Will could barely hold himself up on his elbows. He kissed Hannibal as he spoke, eating his words. "I would feel the dark briar where your fantasies roam," Hannibal continued, removing his hand to press two fingers into Will's mouth, who sucked at them greedily. "Feel the shape of the knots and the sharp points of glass, hooks, and razors. I would cut my hands on you to discern the arrangement. I wouldn't care if your organs tore as I removed the deadly instruments inside of you, discarding the pieces that aren't yours." Hannibal removed his fingers and Will whined, shuddering as if each word plucked the taut strings inside him. Hannibal pressed his slick finger against Will's hole, pressing softly so he could feel every twitch and contraction as Will opened to him. "Your body is just a house," Hannibal hissed. "Your mind cannot be contained. You can't hide from me. I would let you bleed out on my dining room table so I could see every inch of you."

Will squirmed against him, anguished pleasure in each breath. "Yes," he pleaded. "I want you to."

Hannibal's finger breached the tight muscle of Will's hole, slick with spit and strong. Hannibal curled his finger around the rim, and alternated rubbing small circles with his first joint and pressing in and out shallowly. Will clenched up, whimpering and kissing Hannibal weakly. He rubbed soothing circles on Will's lower back, bidding him to relax but knowing he had too much fight in him. Will pressed back against his finger, aching for more, but Hannibal was devastatingly patient. He stretched Will slowly. Inside he was hot and velvety. He pushed deeper, feeling the muscle slip over his second knuckle. He pulled back to feel that slip again, and Will collapsed on his chest. "I'm -- oh god." Will rubbed himself against Hannibal's naval, painfully hard, and thrust back on his finger.

"I wonder, could you come like this?" Hannibal breathed.

"Heh, probably," Will replied with a grimace. "It's... feels so good."

Hannibal pulled out and twisted his finger, and Will cried out. "Don't... stop," he gasped.

"So impatient." Hannibal reached over to the bedside table to open the drawer, and fished out a jar of lube. Will relaxed somewhat when he realized what Hannibal was doing, and continued to rub himself on Hannibal's stomach. Hannibal snapped the band of his briefs. "Off."

Will rolled off him and practically tore off his briefs. He climbed back over Hannibal, hand at his hip. "Can I?" Will asked, so much trembling need in him that Hannibal wondered if he could refuse. He nodded, and Will sagged his shoulders in relief. He slipped Hannibal's briefs down, gasping with hunger as his cock fell hard and leaking against his abdomen. Will clutched the sheets, looking like he was overcome with dizziness. He bent his head and kissed Hannibal's naval with a growl, his smell suffusing him.

"Will," Hannibal said in warning as his mouth moved lower.

"Why not?" Will bit at his hip, sucking the bone there. "I want to taste you, I want to feel you."

Hannibal tugged him up by the arm. He was very difficult to refuse, with his slick and bleeding lips and the delicate flush on his pale, sweat-gleaming skin. But refusing him and having him only as Hannibal wanted was immensely satisfying. How would Will learn patience otherwise? "No," Hannibal said, barely a whisper. Will flushed and his features stiffened with the rejection. Hannibal guided him to where he was before and slid two lube-slick fingers down his ass.

"You're the depraved one," Will hissed. "I wonder what I would see -- if I peeled your skin back."

Hannibal breached him with two fingers and Will collapsed in a shuddering mess against him, cursing. Even with the lube Will was tight, resisting the intrusion even as he rolled himself back onto Hannibal's digits. He thrust in, and shivered at the high noise of pain that escaped Will. Will clenched down, biting at Hannibal's chest. His cock leaked against Hannibal's skin and he lifted his hips so he could push down against the taught muscle of his abdomen. Hannibal lifted slightly to angle his fingers deeper and then, inspiration striking, he sat up and shifted Will so they were chest to chest, his fingers twisting in Will the whole time.

Will drooled against Hannibal's shoulder, gnawing weakly. His panting was a delicate rhythm of "Hahh, hahn, hnnn," as he begged Hannibal's name like a stunted prayer, the name catching with each sharp inhalation. Will was draped over him, all shivering muscles and pale skin stretched over bone. Hannibal curled his two fingers, digging in circles to find the round nub of nerves; the knot, he mused, that he could use to unravel him.

"Fuck!" Will jolted when Hannibal found his prostate, nearly lifting himself off. "Oh god. That --" Hannibal shoved his hips down with his other hand and hit the spot again, and Will's words dissolved into a moan. Hannibal thrust against that spot over and over, Will hot and slippery. He bit Hannibal again to stifle the moans that rolled out of him one after the other.

"Close," Will managed to say. "You're... you're not going to fuck me tonight."

Hannibal kissed his forehead. "Only with my hand."

Will whined, and then Hannibal was moving them again. Will was set on his hands and knees, Hannibal perched behind him. Hannibal knocked his legs wider apart and pressed a hand down between Will's shoulders, who arched his back and rest his head on his hands. Hannibal dipped three fingers into the jar of lubricant and pressed against the glistening, puckered skin. Will let out an aching, broken moan and sunk further into the bed as Hannibal filled him up, stretching the soft tissue with a circling motion. He set an even pace, not so different from how he would fuck Will with his cock, pulling his fingers out almost all the way and pressing in hard. But not too quickly, so he and Will could feel every stretched and clenching inch. With his other hand, Hannibal took Will's cock and stroked him firmly, down to the base with each thrust of his fingers and up to the tip with each extraction. Will was shuddering so violently now that his orgasm must be close. Hannibal slowed his hands, bringing Will ever closer to that edge, the knife to free himself upon.

Will felt the threads pool in his gut, pleasure and pain, shame and exhilaration writhing and drawing tight. Behind his eyes were the bright flashes of blades in the light, slicing through the meaty red patterns of his eyelids, blossoming colors, each beat of his heart unfolding patterns of neural networks and undulating worms and webs of gold and blood -- Will broke open with a wave of hot white, vibrations of plucked strings cacophonous all around him. He heard himself from far away, screaming, and felt blood spill hot on his back, drenching him in sticky, near-black fluid that hardened like an exoskeleton, then began to chip away like ash on the breeze. He could taste blood.

Will's eyes fluttered open. He was on his side with his legs tucked, no trace of tar or ash on his skin, though he could feel it underneath, the way he had crumbled to a fine powder. With half-lidded eyes he gazed up at Hannibal, who was kneeling behind him, hand on his hip. "Oh," Will said softly, as he began to register sensations besides the echoing vibration of his orgasm. Hannibal was thrusting between his thighs. "Oh, god." The nest of deflated pleasure in his groin tensed. He could see the head of Hannibal's cock as it emerged between his legs, just under his scrotum. "Yes," Will hissed.

He clenched his thighs closer together, crossing his ankles. Hannibal shuddered, looming over Will like something primal. Will watched his face closely: the sweat at his hairline; the peel of lips over teeth; and he met his gleaming-dark eyes dilated and shadowed by the hood of his brow, and saw there an abyss teeming with possibility, a dark reflection that tugged his gaze like gravity, like eyes searching for the faintest light. *See me*, Will thought, or was that Hannibal's thought? Eyes that captured each other. The edge of broken black glass slicing into his neck.

Hannibal came and their eyes never left each other. Will felt it like it was his own and panted Hannibal's name over and over, felt his cum spill across his skin so similar to the blood he imagined. Hannibal collapsed next to Will.

Will watched the color disperse in his flushed face and how his labored breathing calmed. He kept his eyes closed, blonde lashes against creased skin, and Will was reminded of the meditative stillness Hannibal would sometimes slip into as he retreated far into the depths of his mind. It struck Will with an unexpected loneliness, that Hannibal would go somewhere he couldn't follow so quickly after opening to him.

Will rest his head on Hannibal's chest, his own tight. He thought of black mirrors, like the ocean under a moonless night, or the mirror over his sink as he washed the sweat of night terrors away, revealing nothing. He stroked Hannibal's arm idly, painfully aware that Hannibal was not returning the touch. When Hannibal did, caressing his waist, Will knew that his eyes were open.

"Where did you go?" Will asked quietly, unable to keep the tenor of loneliness from his voice.

"To the rooms of my mind palace," Hannibal said smoothly, "Where I have carved out a wing for you, and made a room for this night."

Will smiled, pained, like he was already gone and all Hannibal had left was his memories of Will. He wanted to ask *why did you leave me* but it was an absurd question; Hannibal hadn't disappeared, and his quietude was to preserve their time together. "You know I have an eidetic memory?" Will asked instead.

Hannibal nodded. "I myself have a prodigious memory, and I take care to cultivate it."

"Mine is rather overgrown," Will said faintly.

Hannibal must have heard something in his words, for he shifted and tilted Will's head up to look at him. Will stared at the wall. "I would like to clean you and help you get ready for bed," Hannibal said.

"Alright."

"What troubles you?"

Will sighed, and looked at Hannibal's chin. "Do you want to be seen by me?" he asked.

Hannibal paused. To decide, Will thought, or to put his words in order; but when he spoke there was nothing to doubt and his voice held a quiet reverence. "Absolutely," Hannibal said, and Will knew he meant to be known absolutely. Absolution: the word flickered in his mind.

"But you don't show me. You are absolutely in control."

Hannibal massaged the raised muscle by his spine. "You must think it would be easy for me," Hannibal said quietly.

Will looked up suddenly. Yes, it was hard to think of anything Hannibal would find difficult. But if Hannibal wanted to lose control with Will and indulge completely, Will hadn't exactly put him in a conducive position to do so. Will needed Hannibal to control the encounter so Will could let go, and Hannibal orchestrated everything and tended to Will so he could thrash and scratch and be safe. Hannibal's eyes were blank. "I'm sorry," Will said. "You opened to me and all I wanted was to dive in, and then you retreated." The last word caught in his mouth.

Hannibal's eyes softened. He kissed Will on the forehead. "Inches," Hannibal said. "Let me show you the only way I can, in careful and planned inches."

"You don't have to be careful," Will said.

Hannibal smiled. "You want me to take from you what I want. And I do want. I want so much from you I am daily disturbed by the ache for it. But let me be careful with you. You would burn so beautifully in the fire of our desires and then I would be left only with ash in my mouth. If we are to make knives of each other, let me cut you where it isn't vital. Don't ask me to show you everything at once."

Will swallowed. He rolled over and propped himself up on an elbow to kiss Hannibal. "I feel like I'm showing you everything I can," he confessed. "I didn't know if you wanted the same."

"I want to be seen by you," Hannibal said, so Will could hear it in his own voice, and pulled him into a kiss.

Hannibal washed his legs with a warm cloth and brought them water and tea. He gave will a pair of silk pajamas (dark blue) that matched his own (crimson). They fit Will perfectly, and with a blush he realized that Hannibal must have purchased them just for him. They each prepared for bed, and Will felt warm tendrils of sleep pull at his body even before he finished his cup of tea. He fell asleep with his arms around Hannibal.

Hannibal got a few hours of sleep before Will's more violent dreams started. Will was tossing and turning next to him, and had gotten tangled in the sheets. Hannibal watched him struggle wistfully. Will trapped in the agony of a nightmare was a lovely sight to behold.

Hannibal pulled the sheet up over Will's arms and wrapped him more tightly. He smoothed the sweat-soaked curls away from Will's eyes so he could watch them flutter. "You're trapped," Hannibal whispered in his ear. "Look at the trap you've made for yourself. It's squeezing around you, tighter and tighter." Will moaned and thrashed side to side. "The wire cuts into your skin,"

Hannibal continued, holding his head still so he could better whisper in his ear. "The hooks dig in. You are lifted into the web."

His hand traveled down Will's spasmodic form and found his partial election through the sheets. He grabbed him firmly and began to stroke, voice low and repetitive. "You're trapped. Look at the trap you've made for yourself. Pull the lines tighter, tighter, tighter."

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Will woke with a headache that followed him throughout the day. Still, waking up with Hannibal and eating a hearty breakfast set him off on the right foot. He drove home to shower and spend some time with his dogs before heading to the FBI Headquarters.

The team had a number of leads to follow up on now that they were working the sex-worker angle. Will was sure that the other victims would have hired sex-workers before, but that was difficult to track. Marcus Reyes's friends were helpful, cagey at first, but when it became clear that the FBI had no interest in busting escorts, they pointed to the right websites and discrete corners of social media. Will interviewed one friend — a trans woman who had helped Marcus find his footing in the scene.

Eden wore a large red flannel shirt open over a t-shirt decorated with cartoon characters, skinny jeans, and her makeup was practiced and striking. The coat hanging on her chair was too large, but warm. Poor, Will thought, can't be picky about outerwear when you're trying to survive a cold winter. Hand-me-downs or something from Good Will. Spends money on makeup and hormones, and skips meals if she has to. Hustling to make rent each month, but not desperate. Used to living on little.

"He started as a cam boy," Eden said with thinly veiled exasperation. "Wanted to make real money meeting some of his viewers. I helped him get some real work."

"How long did you know him?" Will asked.

"A few years online, met in person last spring."

"He was young," Will said. Eden was around Will's age, maybe a few years younger.

Eden raised her perfectly shaped eyebrows. "He was new to the work, if that's what you're asking. If you think one of his clients did this, well, he didn't have that many."

"We're not ruling it out," Will said, even though he knew they wouldn't find the killer in Marcus's work history. "How well did you know Marcus? Did anything of note happen recently?"

Eden tapped her chin thoughtfully. "We weren't really close, but he thought of me as a mentor, so I heard about some shit. Kid was having a rough time, depressed. Honestly, when I first heard that something had happened… I thought he might have killed himself."

Will leaned forward on the table. "Did he seem suicidal?"

She shrugged. “I’ve known a lot of people who have been suicidal. You pick up on the signs, and I thought — you start anticipating it. Who’s not going to survive this winter.” She was calm, not at all uncomfortable talking about suicide. Will could see the history of loss there, in her tight shrug and pursed lips. “I didn’t think it was that bad,” she continued. “Turns out it was much, much worse.”

Will nodded. She was watching him with discerning eyes, looking freely at his face since Will was avoiding eye contact. “We’re also looking into other sex workers,” Will said.

Eden shifted in her seat. “You mean as suspects? Aren't serial killers supposed to be some fucked up john slashing up prostitutes?”

Will glanced at her chin and saw the bitter smile there. “Not this serial killer,” he admitted. “If there’s anything you can tell us about your line of work, it might be helpful.”

She drummed her nails on the table. “We all know each other, sort of. Certain circles. You watch out for each other, help get work, use Walk Me Home.”

“Walk Me Home?” Will asked.

“It’s an app,” Eden explained. “You notify someone when you’re meeting a client and they track your location, make sure you check in so that you’re safe, that sort of thing.”

“Did Marcus have this app?” Will asked.

“Sure did.”

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They tracked Marcus’s movements up until 10:48pm the night he was killed, when he checked safe at a hotel that was 6 miles away from the warehouse. His roommate had been tracking him with Walk Me Home, and said that Marcus wasn’t seeing a client, just a friend. What friend? She didn’t know.

“If it was a client, Marcus would have used the app until he got back home,” Will said. “That’s how he used it before.”

“So he trusted this friend he was meeting,” Beverly mused. “But not so much that he didn’t use the app to get there?”

“Or he just felt unsafe in that neighborhood,” Will suggested.

“What sort of ‘friend’ do you meet at a hotel on the other side of town?” Jack asked the room.

“A sexy friend,” Price said.

“A married sexy friend,” Zeller embellished.

Jack raised his eyebrows.

“Someone you don’t want to be seen with,” Beverly said. “Or someone who has something you need.”

They investigated the hotel, but no one matching Marcus’s description rented a room that night. Surveillance at the entrance and bar didn’t show anything either. The killer had met Marcus here, somewhere outside the hotel. It wasn’t the first time they had met. Either Marcus felt safe enough to dismiss Walk With Me, or the killer knew his pin and marked him ‘safe’ after he was subdued. But there were no marks to suggest that Marcus had been choked out, and no traces of chloroform or a similar substance. Will walked outside of the hotel and looked at the surroundings, thinking.

The killer needed a car, a covered pickup that he could transport his materials in. Will tried to imagine Marcus here — young and inexperienced. Getting in a truck with someone he sort of knew, driving to the industrial part of the city, sharing a drink laced with cyanide while leaning on the hood of the car.

He doesn’t see me as someone threatening, Will thought, *or he wants to impress me. I’m not seducing him. I tell him I’m in town for a few days and we meet outside the hotel I’m supposedly staying at. The suggestion to go for a drive is a surprise, and instead of inputting new coordinates into his app, Marcus marks himself as safe and dismisses it. I help him get away from everything. Marcus needs to get away. We drive aimlessly (I am carefully circling the warehouse that is my stage). Marcus talks to me. He needs to talk to someone. We drink together and I watch him knock back his poison with a smile.*

There is nothing sexual between us. How is Marcus sure that he will be safe from my advances? Am I straight? No, that's hardly an assurance; Marcus has met with men who have claimed the same. Older? He doesn’t see me as threatening. My other victim is already waiting at the warehouse.

“They knew each other online,” Will said aloud, but no one was around. Jack was a little ways away, talking with the hotel management. He noticed Will say something and walked over.

“What is it?” Jack asked.

“They knew each other online,” Will said again. “The killer and Marcus. He was meeting an online friend who was passing through town.”

“You sure?” Jack peered at him intently.

Will sighed. “The killer knew something happened to Marcus, some disgrace the killer freed him from in death. They were comfortable talking to each other. Marcus thought he was safe once he confirmed who he was meeting.”

Jack nodded. “We’ll look into his internet history.”

Will removed his glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose. His headache was getting worse. “Jack?” he called, before he could walk away. Will pressed his fingers against his eyes, sparking patterns of acid yellow against his eyelids. He heard Jack turn back to him. Will took a deep breath. “Jack. The killer is a woman.”

Bloody Mary

Chapter Summary

Hannibal was affected, his blunted emotions disguised by his accent, curtesy, and old world charm. Hannibal was a hedonist, because it was rare that he felt pleasure and he would not deny himself. He spared no expense to sate his peculiar tastes, made plaid suits look good, and actually enjoyed the opera. Every move he made was controlled and meticulous, his control so absolute and necessary. And there was the first barricade, the iron clad and armored fortress that showed Will there was something locked away. Why did Hannibal need control?

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Will tries to wait for Hannibal.

Chapter Notes

this chapter is a little strange so bear with me. I'm making Will more fucked up and symptomatic than he is in the show, which he doesn't deserve, poor man; but if you haven't gathered the entire premise of this fic is that Will has obsessive masochistic thoughts. getting sexual wires crossed with the murders in his head. it's bad news.

cw: self-destruction, self harm by cutting, in a sexy way ;)
(ok but seriously: Hannibal and Will blur the line between self harm and blood play in some of these chapters and it's bad. this is not your mental health OR kink how-to guide. most self harm is off screen or you'll get a cw.)

Will's thoughts on self-harm being manipulative and pathetic do not reflect my own, and are more a reflection of how Will sees himself. Will Graham is a behavioral expert and understands all the reason that someone might self-harm.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will stood by the high window in Hannibal's office. It was raining, and he watched the streaks of raindrops form patterns in the glass like delicate tracery; inevitable, the way the water gathered together like so many creeks into so many rivers. With the dark of the night and the light from the office, Will could see his reflection clearly in the window. No, clearly wasn't right — the image was vibrant but his features puzzled him. Was that really his jaw, his tired eyes? He barely recognized himself anymore. He saw his skin as a mask, a poor container for the writhing things underneath. He saw Hobbs in his eyes, triumphant — *"See."* He saw the feathered stag dipping its impossibly complex antlers in a bow or the beginning of a charge. He saw the Marionette Murderer's wires wrapped around antlers.

“Bloody Mary,” Will said.

“Is that a request?” Hannibal asked from where he stood by his desk, flipping through a book.

“I don’t suppose you ever played that game.” Will shook his head. The eyes of his reflection seemed too large.

“What are you trying to summon?”

Will grinned spitefully. “I don’t need to summon — they’re there. Under the surface. I need to extricate.”

“Ghosts trapped in reflections,” Hannibal said. “The mirror as passageway to another realm, used to speak with the dead. Much like yourself.”

“Bloody Mary,” Will said again. The rivulets of water on glass made him think of mosaics and spider webs. “Call her name and have your future foretold, if she doesn’t steal your soul and drink your blood first. Scare yourself into seeing the horrors waiting in your image.”

“If one stands before a mirror in dim light for a prolonged period of time, it is possible to hallucinate,” Hannibal said clinically. “‘Strange-face illusion’ resulting from disassociate identity effect. One may see their face melt, or transform in a myriad of ways.”

“I don’t recognize myself.” Will touched his reflection in the window. “I can’t remember the last time I looked in a mirror and saw myself, a version of myself I didn’t examine like a stranger. The reflections are getting *stuck*. It’s affecting me. It’s affecting my ability to see the killer clearly.”

“You are a prism, or a concave mirror,” Hannibal suggested. “The subject is bounced around inside your head, and what appears on the surface is distorted.”

“A house of mirrors,” Will said theatrically. “The Marionette Murderer would fit right in. We could make a traveling freak show.”

“Will saying their names bring the killers in your head out to the surface?” Hannibal asked.

Will rested his head against the cool glass of the window. “Probably better than shoving them back down into the dark. I didn’t see her clearly, Hannibal. I knew something was missing but it took me so long, I didn’t even consider that the killer was a woman, because I — because.” He shook his head.

“You take undue responsibility for assuming the Marionette Murderer was a man,” Hannibal said. “No one else questioned the gender of the profile. Most of the killers you see are men, and you made reasonable assumptions based on statistics. Now you have new information, and you must adjust your assumptions.”

“I don’t know how I didn’t see it before,” Will said, impatiently. “No, I know why, but I don’t like the reasons. Female serial killers aren’t unheard of.”

“But considered more rare.” Hannibal was wandering over to him. Will watched him in the reflection.

“What, do you also believe that most serial killers are American?”

“I said considered,” Hannibal replied. “Yes, just because more haven’t been caught doesn’t mean they’re not out there.”

“I realized at the last crime scene,” Will said, retracing his thinking, “that what the Marionette Murderer does isn’t actually as physically taxing as it seems. I considered physical disability before I considered that she was a woman. Not that she’s not strong, she is. Her subjects were men. The victim she identifies with was a man. I saw myself as her, overriding her image.”

Hannibal came up behind Will, placing his hands on his hips. Will looked at the two of them in the mirror, haloed in light, two shadows entwined. “Bloody Mary,” Will repeated for the third time with a smirk, and saw Hannibal smile as well.

Hannibal rested his chin on Will’s shoulder, inhaling his scent. “Have you ever been to Mexico or Central America?” Hannibal asked.

It took Will a moment to figure out how Hannibal’s mind had made that leap. “Perceived lack of serial killers?” he guessed. “Because they haven’t been caught, because their crimes have been tied up in drug wars?”

Hannibal hummed against his skin. “Actually, I was thinking of *Las Poquianchis*, two of the most prolific known pair of killers.”

“Sisters,” Will said with a nod.

“I was also thinking about enjoying the sight of you on a beach, soaking up the sun.” Hannibal kissed his neck. “We would go to *Teotihuacán* and *Chichen Itza* and walk on the temples of dead gods. You would fish off the gulf coast, and I would cook what you caught.”

Will leaned back into him, feeling lonely. “I don’t know why you want me,” he breathed.

“Only to sate my carnal needs, I assure you,” Hannibal teased, and Will laughed.

“Sorry, I swear I’m not fishing.” Will rubbed his brow. “I used to know who I was. I had my dogs, my lectures, my fly fishing, my solitude. I might not have been exactly happy, but I was content at times. I only had nightmares every other night. I knew what to expect for myself.”

“Am I changing your expectations for your life?” Hannibal asked.

Will shut his eyes tight. His chest ached, like something was being wrenched loose. *No*, he admonished himself, *I can’t look there.* “I don’t —" The words cut off. He swallowed hard.

“Would you like to travel with me?” Hannibal asked, and Will felt the claws rake his chest. “There is so much of the world I want to show you. The Carnevale di Venezia, the White Nights Festival of St. Petersburg, the Reed Flute caves in China.”

“You can’t talk about that,” Will said breathlessly. “You can’t talk about the future like I’m not coming apart at the seams, like this is anything other than a temporary arrangement.” His words were bitter, pained with wanting a life Will knew he could never have.

Hannibal held Will tighter. Will stiffened, despite himself. “I don’t want this to be temporary,” Hannibal said. “Do you?”

His chest was impossibly tight. He didn’t answer. “I can’t get through the day without clawing at my skin,” Will hissed. “I’m self destructive and I don’t want to stop. You’re my psychiatrist.”

“Not technically.”

“*Don’t*.” Will bit the inside of his cheek. “Don’t pretend like this could be official.”

“My dear, depraved boy.” Hannibal nuzzled under his jaw. "Pushing me away when you are desperate for my reassurance."

Will felt the tears welling up. It was growing inside him: the rejections, the abandonment his father had seeded in him with his neglect, all the times Will had tried to have a social life before realizing he felt most lonely in a crowd, the gap in his heart he never imagined being able to fill with a companion. "I would be bad for you," he whispered.

"When you fall apart, I will be there to catch the pieces," Hannibal said. "I will take you apart and put you together again. Where others would turn away from your darkest fantasies, I will stay."

"You can't!" Will snapped.

Hannibal turned around and pushed him up against the window, hard. He forced Will to look at him. "I can," he said firmly. "I will."

Hannibal sat Will on the floor before his chair and spent the rest of their session massaging the knots out of him. Will wondered about keeping their 'activities' out of the office, but mostly he was grateful, mostly he thought about how Hannibal would wreck him next. Coming apart under his hands, putting him back together. Will felt cared for. He felt sick with wanting.

"Tonight I am going to see a short opera performance at the museum," Hannibal said as he watched Will drink the water he gave him. "Would you like to come with me?"

Will shook his head, wiping his mouth dry. "Don't think I could handle mingling with Baltimore's elite."

"Why?" Hannibal tilted his head. "You can slip into the minds of anyone."

"I don't want to pretend. I'm tired and my mind is full of barbed wire." Will felt a smile twitch to his face, sad and uneven. "You want to watch me perform, transform into your arm candy."

"Another time perhaps," Hannibal said, not denying it. "Would you have dinner with me beforehand?"

Will found it puzzling when Hannibal asked Will to decide instead of ordering him. Nothing was a simple question. Hannibal was gathering information, waiting to see if Will reacted as anticipated or defied his expectations; and Will thought about what Hannibal thought he would decide before Will considered what he actually wanted. Another reflection, another tangle.

"Yeah, sure." Will tried to make his smile more convincing, knowing he failed. "Sounds good."

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Will was starting to become comfortable in Hannibal's house. He stretched his legs and wandered through the rooms with his wine while Hannibal cooked. Hannibal really was an eccentric, and a master decorator. Will could see the years of work put into cultivating his home into one that was aesthetically pleasing and harmonious. Every room was highly textured, with patterned walls, carpets, and ornamentation that should have clashed but didn't. Hannibal wasn't sentimental, and Will imagined there wasn't much here that Hannibal couldn't live without. There was nothing in the rooms that spoke of his personal connections -- no photographs of family or friends. Will imagined that some of the displayed objects were gifts: a kintsugi vase, a medieval looking bestiary, an unused ashtray carved from ivory, and the full set of samurai armor standing sentry on the second floor. *The eccentric foreign bachelor*, Will thought, *no conversation pieces here, just what he finds beautiful and interesting.*

Will had always tried not to profile his partners. It was rude. The first time he dipped into their heads, they were fascinated, made self-important through the act of being seen. The second or third time, it got creepy. Will couldn't help but see what they wanted him to see, and the hidden truths beneath. It was different with Hannibal. Hannibal had seen him and showed pieces of himself in turn (careful, hard won inches). Hannibal had been right after all: Will did find him interesting.

Hannibal was affected, his blunted emotions disguised by his accent, curtesy, and old world charm. Hannibal was a hedonist, because it was rare that he felt pleasure and he would not deny himself. He spared no expense to sate his peculiar tastes, made plaid suits look good, and actually enjoyed the opera. Every move he made was controlled and meticulous, his control absolute and necessary. And there was the first barricade: the iron clad and armored fortress that showed Will there was something locked away. Why did Hannibal need control?

Will tried not to think of the sort of lack of control Hannibal must have experienced that made him an impenetrable fortress. Will tried not to see the loss behind all the decoration and cultivation.

Wills hands were healed and he didn't drop his utensils. Hannibal enjoyed Will's enjoyment of the food, and Will enjoyed his enjoyment. Two mirrors pointed at each other. They went upstairs.

There was an addition to the bedroom: a large mirror with a gilded carved frame, leaned up against the wall and angled towards the bed. Will tried not to stare at it.

Will undressed Hannibal and hung up his clothes. His hands didn't shake as much this time. Hannibal took Will to the bathroom and stripped him, touching every mark with care and admiration. Will kissed him and Hannibal let him, but didn't press for more. They got in the shower.

Will relaxed under the hot pressure of the shower. Hannibal stood behind him, washing his back. It felt insanely good to have Hannibal wash him, and Will was half hard, but not impatient. Hannibal massaged Will's scalp with ginger-scented shampoo, lingering and playing with his hair. He washed every inch of Will, moving him as needed. Will turned around and returned the favor. He put Hannibal under the shower head and watched the water track over his skin, how his hair darkened when wet, thinking of cracked mirrors repaired with gold. It was surprisingly pleasurable to care for Hannibal like this, and Will felt affection spilling through the cracks under his skin.

They dried each other off, and Will ruffled Hannibal's hair, laughing at the pout on his face. Hannibal moisturized -- of course he did -- and Will sat on the edge of the tub watching him.

"Pick out my outfit," Hannibal ordered, towel hanging low on his hips.

Will blanched. "I really wouldn't know where to start."

Hannibal stood waiting. "I'm curious what you would pick," he confessed. "And we need to start cultivating your sense of fashion somewhere."

Will looked unsure. "Are you going to punish me if I choose wrong?" he teased.

"Don't make me late," was all that Hannibal said. Resigned, Will entered the walk-in-closet, not bothering to cover himself with a towel.

There were too many options. Will knew it would have to be a three piece suit, but then there was the question of shirt and tie. Everything looked expensive and Will couldn't tell what was actually nicer than the others. He checked for designer tags, but most were custom-tailored and had no labels. Will thought back to the suits he had seen Hannibal work in, and began to rule out some of the numerous options. *I'm profiling a closet*, he thought with a chuckle.

Will wanted to see Hannibal in red. It was the color he associated him with, even though he rarely wore it, favoring instead blues and warm neutrals. Red was the color of meat and broken blood vessels and the glint of Hannibal's eyes in certain light. Will found a dark brown suit with thin red plaid lines. The red was vibrant but the overall affect was subtle. Will glanced at the rack of shirts, eyeing the pinks with amusement, but ended up choosing white. Then it was time to decide on ties and Will stared at the door of hanging ties with mounting horror.

"Do you wear all of these?" Will called over his shoulder, fingering a paisley monstrosity. Hannibal was doing something in the other room, moving about and opening a drawer. "Can I bring you options?"

When Hannibal continued to ignore him Will cursed quietly. Red and white. Might as well try matching colors? Will selected a wide tie with red, floral shapes on cream, and switched the white shirt with one that matched the creamy white. Then he grabbed black socks and underwear (silky, thin) and carried everything out to the bedroom.

Hannibal had laid a few things out on the bed: a silver pill case, a black leather collar and matching handcuffs connected by a heavy silver chain. Will glanced from the spread on the bed to Hannibal, who was standing expectantly by the bed, towel discarded. His face was blank, but Will could feel a flicker of amusement beneath the surface. Will laid the selected outfit out on the bed neatly, like he imagined Hannibal would. Will wanted to touch the collar, but Hannibal was judging the clothes Will had picked, so he took a step back.

Hannibal was pleased with Will's choices, and Will felt immediately and embarrassingly proud. Christ. Will was blushing. "Well done," Hannibal said. "You're not color blind after all."

"Thanks," Will said sarcastically.

Hannibal pouted his lips slightly. "The socks don't match the outfit. Black and brown is a terrible combination. I imagine you chose them to match the briefs but no one at the Opera will see my undergarments."

"I should hope not." Will reached out and touched the collar. It was black leather, about an inch wide, with buckle closure in the back and a metal ring on the front. There was already a thick chain attached at the front that was connected to the matching handcuffs. The hairs on the back of his neck stood on end, and saliva welled in his mouth. "When do you have to leave?" he asked.

"Shortly after you dress me," Hannibal replied. "Then you will wait for me to return."

Will nodded. Restraint, anticipation, denial. Hannibal didn't need to be here to dominate him. Whatever he asked of Will, Will would accept. The thought made him itch. Will gazed at Hannibal's body, strong and lightly scarred and flaccid, utterly uninterested in Will's half erection. Not completely uninterested, just academically so. Will wanted to touch him all over, but Hannibal wanted to be dressed, and what Hannibal wanted won out. Will could take some pleasures, though. He tried not to smirk.

Will took the black briefs in two hands and knelt before Hannibal on both knees, staring up at him with the same look of admiration Hannibal had for his wounds. It was so easy to reflect that feeling back -- *a beautiful body, made to hurt and be hurt*. He saw Hannibal's pupils dilate at the sight of Will's subjugation. *So you actually do get off on this,* Will thought to himself. *Narcissistic control freak.*

Hannibal stepped into the briefs and Will pulled them up his legs slowly, rising gently as he did, close enough that Hannibal could feel his breath on his skin. Will ran his fingers along the inside of the band to feel the taut skin over the crest of his hip bones. He kept a hand lightly on Hannibal as he took up the cream colored shirt. Hannibal turned his back to him and slipped into the sleeves that Will held out. Will turned him again and smoothed his hands over Hannibal's chest. Will buttoned it up from the bottom, taking his time so his hands wouldn't slip. He smoothed the shirt out, just an excuse to touch Hannibal more. There were no buttons on the cuff.

Will faltered. "Uh, cufflinks?"

"The top drawer of the bureau," Hannibal said with an inclination of his head. "I put them on before the suit jacket but after everything else."

"If you have half as many cufflinks as you do ties I think you're going to be late to your performance," Will said.

"Perhaps I'll have mercy on you."

Will took the matching pants and knelt again, unable to keep the smirk from his eyes. Hannibal stepped into the trousers gracefully. Grace is power, Will thought, making his body lithe and sinuous, buttoning Hannibal's pants as he tossed his head back like shaking dew from antlers. He could feel Hannibal watching him, staring down at his face and looking at the mirror in turns. However Hannibal saw him felt incredible. Will dressed him in the vest and jacket, both unbuttoned, slid the tie around the upturned collar and tugged Hannibal into a kiss, brief, more like a bite. He tied a simple knot; Hannibal would have to deal. Hannibal wasn't wasting a single fuck on the tie. His gaze was ravenous, the twitch of his lip the hint of a snarl.

Will felt powerful. He felt dangerous. He wanted to cut the suit off Hannibal and bleed them on it, fuck Hannibal in a pool of their blood. It was dizzying. He didn't know whether the desire was completely his or a fucked up reflection of Hannibal's. Will kept the bloodlust from his voice and controlled his expression as he said, "If I had decided to come with you, what would I wear? Do you already have a suit made for me?"

Hannibal's smile was slow and delighted. "Yes. I commissioned it the day after you let me tie you to my table."

"Presumptuous prick," Will said with a grin. All that was left were the cufflinks and shoes. "When did you take my measurements? Oh -- the rope." He turned his back on Hannibal without hesitation, slinking to the closet and opening the first drawer. There weren't that many cufflinks, and he picked a pair without hesitation, a pearly material with a smooth disk of black-red. He returned and Hannibal had the collar in his hands.

They stood in front of each other, each admiring the other and that admiration bouncing between them. Will inclined his head, half a question, half an invitation. Hannibal took a step forward and slid the collar around Will's neck, poorly disguising a growl of pleasure as he clasped the leather. It was a comforting weight. Hannibal trailed his fingers through the soft curls at the back of Will's neck, and pressed a finger in between his collar and skin so that it was tight. Hannibal bound his wrists in the hard leather cuffs, eyes sparking with lust and possessiveness. The chain connecting the collar and cuffs was short, so Will couldn't fully extend his arms, but there wasn't much it would actually prevent him from doing.

"How does it feel?" Hannibal asked, stroking Will's jaw.

"It feels like you're about to ditch me," Will replied. He got down on his knees again, unnecessary, but in a weird reversal it made Will feel more powerful. Getting on the cufflinks was a bit awkward now that his wrists were basically bound together. Will held one of the cufflinks in his mouth while he put the other one in, hoping he was folding the french cuffs correctly. Then he put on the other, and Hannibal touched the dark red stone that had been held in Will's mouth. Hannibal sat down, and Will shuffled to get the socks. Black and brown be damned, Hannibal wanted to wear exactly what Will had picked for him.

"Shoes," Hannibal instructed.

Will went back to the closet and picked out a pair of brown loafers. He nearly had to get to his knees again to pick them up thanks to the restraints. He knelt again and slid them on Hannibal's feet. Hannibal put his heel on Will's shoulder, pushing him lower. Will gasped, eyes snapping up. Hannibal flicked open the small silver pill case with one hand and offered the contents to Will: two different pills that he didn't recognize.

"What are they?" Will asked.

Hannibal flexed his foot, the heel digging into Will. "Do you need to know?"

"I don't want to hallucinate."

"I know." Not exactly a promise that they weren't hallucinogenics.

Will opened his mouth.

Hannibal removed his foot and placed the pills one at a time on Will's tongue and he swallowed them dry. "Good boy," Hannibal said.

"I'm 34," Will said, incredulous.

“And I am over a decade your senior,” Hannibal replied, adding with an infuriating smirk, “*boy*.” He carted his hand through Will’s hair, who leaned into the touch. Whatever the pills were, their effects weren’t immediate. “Your phone is on the bedside table,” Hannibal said. “If you absolutely need me, call, and I will return early. You must stay hydrated. Do not leave the bedroom. Do not touch yourself or bring yourself to orgasm.”

Will wet his lips. "Anything in particular I am supposed to be doing while I wait, pining for you?"

Hannibal stood up, adjusting his cuffs. He stepped around Will and dimmed the lights to their lowest setting. "Fantasize," Hannibal said simply, and left, closing the door behind him.

Will stared at the closed door for a minute, listening as Hannibal exited the house and pulled his car of the drive. He sat on the edge of the bed and glanced in the mirror. "Strange-face-illusion, huh?" he said aloud. His eyes were adjusting to the dim light. The mirror was large enough to capture his entire body, naked and collared. "I don't need your help to hallucinate, Hannibal."

He fell back on the mattress with a sigh. He yanked at the chains experimentally, but all it did was tug at his neck. Will curled up on his side. Even though he was naked, he didn't feel cold. He felt a little warm, in fact.

Unable to nap, Will stood up and searched Hannibal's room, avoiding looking in the mirror. In the right bedside table he found lube, condoms, lavender oil, a box of disposable latex gloves, a phone charger, and massage oil. It was all organized. In the left bedside table he found a blank sketchbook with some pages removed, a set of drawing pencils and charcoal, and an exact-o-blade. Will wondered where Hannibal kept his drawings, and remembered a flat file storage system in the study. He was tempted to disobey Hannibal and go downstairs to look, but decided against it. The waste bins were empty. Hannibal had left a pitcher of water and glasses by the table next to the day bed.

Will looked under the bed and found an old-fashioned leather medical bag. He sat on the floor and opened it, and his heart skipped a beat. It was filled with coils of rope, wax candles, a lighter, the bit, dildos and other sex toys, EMT shears, and — jesus christ, Hannibal — metal clamps. He shut the bag and his eyes, tight. He was flushing. It was rather warm, had Hannibal turned up the heat for him? He scratched his neck. How long had Hannibal had these… instruments? How many others had he used them on? Had he used them on himself? Will shuddered, imagining Hannibal stretching himself wide on a butt plug.

Will was definitely getting hard now. He put the bag back where he found it. His skin was hot and sensitive, and whenever his arms brushed his chest it sent sparks through him. He poured himself a glass of water carefully and sat on the day bed to drink. God, he was so thirsty. He felt every heartbeat in his cock. "What the fuck did you give me?" he groaned. Will rubbed his temples, a pressure headache growing against his skull. He drank another glass of water.

Will tried to ignore his erection away, but even with no stimulation and Will reciting academic papers aloud, he was still painfully hard. Hannibal had definitely given him viagra or something. Restraint. Denial. Will cursed. Even when he bent in half he couldn't touch himself. He lay on his stomach on the bed and ground himself into the sheets, which were so soft and smooth. Hannibal would be able to smell it. He could take one of the suits and rub himself on it. Fuck. There wasn't enough stimulation to get himself off, and after a while he just became frustrated.

He gave up, and stood in front of the mirror. He had expected to see a tired, horny wreck, but instead he saw someone powerful. The massage from earlier had loosened Will's back, and even

with the chain that weighed Will's arms against his neck, he didn't have his usual hunch. His shoulders were back, his hip canted, a contrapposto statue pumping with blood. Will's eyes were dark, and the dim light of the room made his face shadow and bone. Will leaned into the feeling. He wasn't prey, constantly ducking his head and avoiding eye contact; he was a predator, defiant in his chains. Will saw blood in his eyes, deep caves where nightmares surged. His smile wasn't his own, and it wasn't Hobbs, and it wasn't one of Hannibal's carefully painted masks. His smile was a blade in the dark, deadly and unexpected.

The stag stepped out of the shadows in the mirror behind him. Each step drew sticky black tar from the floor, thick strands under hoof. It shuddered, feathers quivering, and shook the blood from its coat. Will felt the droplets on his back and saw them speckle the mirror. He opened his mouth in a soft moan.

His vision was shuddering. The shadows grew darker and the lights burned in a haze. Goosebumps covered his skin and he thought about stabbing each with a needle. In the mirror, the stag lowered his antlers and -- fuck -- slowly penetrated Will's reflection. His double moaned wantonly, and then the antlers emerged from his chest, dark red, his skin stretching around each wound. Will tried to grab his dick, forgetting the chain, and yanked his neck. He sank to his knees before the mirror and watched as the stag fucked him on its antlers. Will laughed, his eyes stinging and wet.

It was too much. Will leaned his head against the mirror. He could feel it, like an echo, all the puncture wounds in him, and the shame welled in him as he recalled Marissa Schurr impaled on the deer head like an effigy and felt himself grow harder. He cursed, breathing labored. Abigail and Hobbs, hunting deer, hunting him in the woods. The elk rising from the briar of antlers, prey becoming predator. Academic papers on penetration issues and rent boys stabbed in the face and genitals; penetration fixation; Saturn devouring his son; his mind was reeling too fast; an entire theater filled with sex workers watching their johns puppeted bloody across the stage.

Will smacked his head lightly against the mirror. He wanted to crack his skull on it and break it into shards, he wanted those shards in his skull. He had seen that kind of impact in a mirror before, and the bloody spiderweb cracks it made. Will panted. And then, his mind focused in. He could do it. He could smash his skull and ruin Hannibal's gilded framed mirror and leave him with a bloody mess to clean up when he returned. It was an incredibly stupid idea. Will could seriously hurt himself. But his mind was coming back together. He could do it. He *wanted* to do it.

Will didn't move. If he looked up and saw his reflection he might seriously head butt himself and crack open. Get all the killers out of his skull. God, he really was self-destructing. He should call Hannibal, he really was going to hurt himself somehow. But he didn't want to interrupt Hannibal's enjoyment of the performance. He told himself that's why he didn't call, not because he didn't want to be stopped.

Will shuffled over to the bed and grabbed his phone. *call me as soon as you can* he texted. He laid back on the bed, smacking his chest and yanking his chain when he thought about throwing himself at the mirror. It was the only way he could focus right now, thinking about how he would actually harm himself in this room. An odd calm settled on him when he thought of it. The blade Hannibal used to sharpen his pencils -- Will could cut himself with it, shallow repetitive marks on his chest and hips. He wouldn't want to get blood everywhere, so he should do it in the bathroom; though the idea of waiting for Hannibal while bleeding in his bathtub was way too melodramatic. He could break the pitcher of water and use the shards. There was an ibex horn on the mantle beneath a painting, and he thought of stabbing his thigh with it.

Will didn't want to look too closely at why he wanted to seriously harm himself and ruin the night Hannibal had orchestrated. He didn't want to think about Mexico. He wanted to bleed.

The phone rang. Will scrambled and answered it on the second ring. His heart was hammering in his chest.

"Will," came Hannibal's voice, along with the noises of a crowd. "The performance just ended. Are you alright?"

"I'm seriously thinking about cracking my skull on your mirror," Will said, and heard the mocking tone of his voice.

"Is it that torturous? I won't be long."

Will heard the hint of a smile in Hannibal's voice, and squeezed his eyes shut, his chest tight. "No, Hannibal, I -- I'm not kidding. I think I'm going to hurt myself."

There was a beat of silence. “Wait for me,” Hannibal said firmly. Voices were crowding near him, Will could hear someone trying to get his attention.

"I think the mirror is too risky," Will said, the strange calm settling over him again. "I'll take the razor into the bathroom and cut myself a new one for you."

"Will. Hold on a moment." His voice was sharp, and then, to someone else, "I'm very sorry, but I must take this call."

Will sat up, and held the phone in the crook of his shoulder. He got the exact-o-knife from the bedside drawer and ran his thumb lightly over the blade. When Hannibal spoke again, he was somewhere quiet. "I'm coming right away," Hannibal said, and Will felt a pang in his chest. Fuck. He was going to ruin this.

"What did you give me?" Will asked as he walked to the bathroom.

"A PDE5 inhibitor. Nothing that should cause hallucinations."

"Just a dimly lit mirror," Will muttered. He locked the bathroom door behind him. He was aching hard and his skin itched and he felt like he might scream.

"Are you hallucinating?" Hannibal asked. His voice was calm.

"Sort of." Will sat against the door. There was a drain on the floor of the bathroom beneath the standing tub. "Do you wanna fuck in the tub?"

"Are you holding a blade, Will?"

Will swallowed. "Yes."

"Will. I instructed you to stay hydrated, to stay in the bedroom, and not to bring yourself to orgasm." He paused. "I did not order you not to hurt yourself."

"I... You're not going to talk me out of it?" His neck hurt. He turned on speaker phone and put it on the tile next to him, then picked the blade back up. "Are you using reverse psychology on me?"

"Are you going to smash your head into the mirror?"

"No. I'm... I'm going to cut myself."

"Are you going to cut yourself in a vital place?"

Will clenched the handle of the razor. "No, I don't want to bleed out."

"You want to hurt."

"I am hurting." Will banged his head against the door.

"What was that?"

"My head."

"Cut your thigh," Hannibal instructed. "Three inches above your knee, perpendicular to your femur. Make it shallow, no more than two inches long. Describe it for me."

Will dropped his chin, which dig into the collar. He could follow directions. He could compromise. Will took a deep breath. He pressed the edge of the small blade against the skin of his thigh. "I'm putting pressure slowly. The way my skin rises on either side of the blade makes me think of the way wire might cut. Can actually push down fairly hard without breaking the skin, so long as I don't drag the blade."

"Let up some of the pressure, you'll cut too deep."

Will did, and slid the blade. "Oh. It's -- smooth. I can see the skin parted, now there's blood. It's running down my leg. My knees are up, I --" He removed the blade with some effort. "Stopped cutting. It's not that shallow, sorry. God, I'm really hard and it must be the drugs, but it felt good, it hurts."

"What else do you feel?"

Will gasped for air. "I feel like I'm swelling up, I've got to release some of it. I'm going to cut myself again, and again, not because I'm trying to push you away or because I'm afraid of myself, but because I want to. I'm so tired of pain and this hurts but it's so much better than what's in my head."

"You may cut yourself again," Hannibal said, and Will could hear a note of tension in his voice. "You may not cut deeper, or longer."

Will whined. He could see himself cutting deep, over and over, dragging the small blade in a lovely curve into his femoral artery. He banged his head against the door.

"Stop that."

Will cut himself, quick and shallow and longer than the first. "I wasn't a masochist before," he said in a trembling voice. "Can you really become one? Can the wires just cross when you kill someone, when you -- god. You're a sadist, I know you are, that's why you went into surgery. You're getting hard now but your knuckles are white on the steering wheel, you're angry, or scared, because you didn't predict this, you thought you would come back to me fucking myself on your bed."

Will heard the car screech into the driveway. "I'm not afraid," Hannibal said in a voice that almost convinced Will. "I thought it was possible that you would hurt yourself for pleasure."

"Is that what I'm doing?" Will went to cut himself again, but there was already a third cut beneath the first two. "Fuck," he breathed. A fourth now. Hannibal was knocking at the door -- how had he gotten there so quickly? Will pulled the skin back from one of the wounds. There was something *inside*.

"Will, open up."

The pearly white tip of an antler pressed up from between strands of muscle.

"Please, Will."

Will threw the exact-o-knife against the far wall, grabbed his hair (awkward with the cuffs) and screamed. He must have unlocked the bolt at some point because Hannibal was there, wiping blood away from Will's thigh to assess the wounds. Will saw two cuts. He saw a hundred. Will screamed again.

Then the collar and the cuffs were off, and his back was on the tile, and Hannibal was lapping up the blood from Will's thigh and groin. Will raised his head and Hannibal's eyes were blazing with hunger. His blood was on his lips. His mouth was on Will's cock. Will was on fire but he couldn't orgasm, and the wounds bled fresh and Hannibal went to lick it away again.

"I'm sorry," Hannibal said, wrenching himself away. The mask was falling back in place. "That was not well done of me."

"Fuck me," Will snarled. "Fuck me, cut me, I don't care."

Hannibal's eyes were still blazing, but Will couldn't read him. He fetched a first aid kit from the cabinet, and began to bandage the cuts. "How many are there?" Will asked.

Hannibal paused. "You don't know?"

Will shook his head.

"Three."

"You going to punish me for disobeying you?" Will said venomously. God, he wanted to cry, he wanted to disappear. He probably just ruined the one nice thing left in his life besides his dogs because he couldn't stop from cutting himself, like a stupid goddamn melodramatic teenager. It was so manipulative. It was so pathetic.

Hannibal was done bandaging him. He took Will into his arms and held him tightly, kissing his forehead, and rocking gently. "You are fine," Hannibal said between kisses. "You haven't done irreparable harm. I'm sorry to have left you overstimulated and with few outlets."

"I'm a fucking mess." Will clung to Hannibal's shoulders and buried his face in his neck.

"A beautiful mess," Hannibal corrected. He stroked Will's hip and the side of his thigh.

Will bit his lip. He didn't want to talk about what just happened, he didn't want to scream at Hannibal that he wasn't okay, he didn't want what he wanted. "We have to talk about this," he said

into Hannibal's neck, "before it becomes something unsaid between us. I didn't -- don't misunderstand me."

"Let me take care of you first," Hannibal said softly.

They sat on the floor of the bathroom for what felt like an eternity, Hannibal stroking his side, fingers brushing ever closer to Will's erection. By inches Will relaxed. His breathing evened out, and his grip on Hannibal’s shoulders became less vice-like, until he was draped loosely against him.

"How was the show?" he asked, as Hannibal scratched lightly inside his hip bone.

"Beautiful," Hannibal said reverently. "It was a marvelous performance. I wish you could have heard it. I would very much like to share that beauty with you."

Will just nodded.

"You saved me from what would have been an unfortunate social interaction," Hannibal said with a disgruntled sigh.

"Oh?"

"A patient of mine ambushed me at the show," he explained, sounding terribly affronted. "Thinly disguised as happenstance."

"Are you being stalked, Dr. Lecter?"

"It certainly harasses me," Hannibal replied. "I am thinking about referring him."

"You don't like him. What kind of patient do you give up on though?"

"Ones I don't like," Hannibal quipped.

Will smiled. "That's hardly true. He bores you, doesn't he?"

"There's no challenge. He seeks the attention of powerful men and adapts himself to their preferences, trying to change himself into someone he believes they will like. Hold on to my neck." Will already was, but he held tighter. Hannibal lifted him up easily, carrying him in both arms. Will let out a small moan as the fabric of Hannibal's vest shifted against him.

"Your narcissism is showing again," Will teased.

"Am I wrong?"

"You just lifted me up like I weigh nothing, I'm not going to deny that you're powerful."

Hannibal sat him on the edge of the bed, smiling. Will watched him strip down to his briefs and socks, letting the clothes fall crumpled to the floor in a wholly uncharacteristic way that made his stomach clench. Hannibal knelt on the floor between his legs, tugging Will to the edge of the bed, and wrapped his lips around Will's cock. Hannibal was relentless, taking him deep and hollowing out his cheeks. Will had been hard for hours but he couldn't come. His moans turned into cries of overstimulation, and then he was begging Hannibal to stop, tears leaking out his eyes as Hannibal

choked himself on his cock. Will might have orgasmed twice, it was similar to orgasm but without the satisfaction of release, and he was still *fucking hard*.

"Please let me suck you off," he panted out. "Please god, don't deny me, I'll do anything."

Hannibal removed himself with a grotesque slurping noise. He stood, his legs shaking, and he looked just as hard as Will. "Please," Will begged, holding on to Hannibal's hips for dear life. He felt slightly unhinged and the words poured out of him. "I know you don't want to orgasm with me every time because you don't want to lose control, I know you're afraid of hurting me and showing a part of yourself you aren't ready to give, but *god damn it* Hannibal, I just cut myself in your bathroom because I'm hurtling into the sun and I want you to watch me burn." Will tugged Hannibal's briefs down and fell to his knees, trapped between him and the bed frame. Hannibal's eyes were wide and burning. "Don't say no," Will said, but it was more like asking for permission.

Hannibal tapped his own thigh twice, sharply. "Tap me hard if you need me to stop," Hannibal said in a tight voice.

"Oh my god," Will breathed, and then Hannibal grabbed his hair tight and Will opened his mouth and Hannibal pushed himself inside. Will felt another pseudo-orgasm wash over his body as Hannibal began to fuck into his mouth. He had never liked this sort of roughness before, but now he was delirious with it. Hannibal wasn't holding back, the hand that wasn't forcing Will's head in place was under his jaw so he could feel Will choke on him. Tears slipped freely down Will's cheeks as his gag reflex spasmed painfully. Hannibal was grunting with every thrust. Will couldn't breathe, he was safe, he was surrounded inside and out by Hannibal, he was being killed sweetly.

"Breathe through your nose, deeper," Hannibal instructed in a guttural voice. The edges of Will's vision were going black. He was vaguely aware of the sharp, short inhalations through his nose, insufficient oxygen. More powerfully, he felt a swell of warmth in his chest: Hannibal was taking care of him. Hannibal removed himself, and it took a moment for Will to swallow the mix of saliva and precum so he could actually breathe, and then he was sobbing weakly. "Don't stop," he pleaded. "Don't you ever fucking dare."

"No," Hannibal agreed. "I'm never letting you go." Then he fucked into Will's mouth until he came, hot and violent, like something was ripped free, and Will had never felt so relieved.

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"My dick is going to be so fucking sore tomorrow," Will complained, lying against Hannibal's chest in the dark. Hannibal made a low humming noise in agreement, languidly stroking Will’s back.

Will felt good. His head was clear, the tension had dispersed from his back, and fucking *finally* the effects of Hannibal’s drugs had worn off. The cuts on his thigh still throbbed with pain but it was very faint; if Will’s mind didn’t keep returning to his self-inflicted wounds, he probably wouldn’t feel them at all. Will sighed. “We should… talk,” Will said, lamely.

“You don’t sound as if you want to talk,” Hannibal said.

“No, not particularly.”

“Then why? Why not lie here in the dark in enjoyment of companionable silence?”

“Hannibal,” Will said, mildly annoyed, “I cut myself. I couldn’t help but cut myself.”

“I am aware.”

“You don’t care?” Will asked snidely. “This — it — this is not fine.”

“You certainly don’t think so,” Hannibal said, sounding supremely unconvinced. “You and I are engaging in activities that involve inflicting physical harm, or as I prefer, extremes of sensation. Yet you see this as outside the bounds. I am trying to understand why.”

“This wasn’t a *scene*,” Will said, even as he did hearing how insufficient that explanation was. Hannibal didn’t reply, and Will was glad he didn’t ask ‘why’ again. “Because I wanted to smash my skull against your mirror,” Will said. “And no, I didn’t, but I might have.”

“I helped you compromise.”

"You weren't in control." Will sighed heavily. “I’m not just fantasizing about being hurt. I am hurting myself. It felt compulsive — what if it becomes a compulsion?”

“Then we will find a suitable outlet for you,” Hannibal said simply.

Will groaned, and pressed his face into Hannibal’s chest. He could feel his heart beat, steady and strong. “I can’t believe you’re this unconcerned,” he muttered.

“I don’t make the habit of needlessly concerning myself,” Hannibal said, “especially when you are worried enough for the both of us.”

“Maybe you just want me to hurt myself.”

Hannibal was quiet, and the stillness startled Will. He pushed himself up on an elbow and looked at Hannibal’s face in the dark. There was no expression to be found on his face. It was unsettling. “You’re a sadist,” Will accused, goading for a reaction. “You want me wounded. Bet you would love it if I disobeyed you and cut too deep. You could stitch me up and then punish me and have me thanking you for it the entire time.”

Hannibal stared at him. His hand was still on the small of Will’s back, but he had stopped stroking him. “I want what’s best for you, Will,” Hannibal said, slowly, sincerely.

Will deflated somewhat. He hung his head. There was nothing more to say, nothing he trusted himself to say. He was provoking, testing the edges of this relationship because he was so sure he would cross a line and bring everything to ruin, so why not get it over with? To admit that to Hannibal would be tantamount to asking Hannibal to redraw the lines — telling Hannibal he must reject Will, making Hannibal promise he wouldn’t, and Hannibal would promise because he believed he could control this. The threads were getting tangled, and Will couldn’t find his way out. “I don’t trust myself,” he said.

“Do you trust me?”

Will lay back down on Hannibal’s chest, running his hand over his ribcage. “I don’t know.”

“That’s alright,” Hannibal said. “I trust myself. Enough for the both of us.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm thinking of a specific drug combination that Hannibal gives Will, but I forget the names. oops. Hannibal instructs Will to cut in a fairly safe place, but the specificity of his instructions are more about giving Will something to latch on to rather than, say, the medically optimal way to cut yourself safely. Hannibal is not being incredibly safe with Will; Hannibal is Hannibal, Will is losing his shit, and please don't take anything in this fic as a BDSM how-to.

thank you to everyone who has left kudos and commented <3

tumblr

Descent into the Underworld

Chapter Summary

Hannibal's smile was small and enigmatic, filled with a warmth that was entirely inappropriate to the discussion of serial killers; but Will knew they were talking about themselves. Every conversation they had, on some level, was about the shape that existed between them. "How would you serenade me?" Will asked, teasingly.

Hannibal's smile reached his eyes. "You're so sure I haven't already? That I don't?"

Will smirked. "Ah, I guess I didn't notice it."

"For what it was," Hannibal amended.

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Hannibal draws Will and tells him a story.

Chapter Notes

this chapter is rated EI for Extremely Indulgent because I make Hannibal retell Will one of my favorite myths, but it's very appropriate because HOOKS and REFLECTIONS. actually this entire fic is indulging some of my more esoteric aesthetic musings. what do gargoyles, evil eyes, and the key of solomon have to do with each other? I'll let you muse on that.

it's surprisingly annoying to use parts of the show script! interrupts my flow. bleh. but it's time for our cat-gut enthusiast to (briefly) take the stage.

cw: bondage, impact play, deep sub space, hypnosis

enjoy the sin. tumblr

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will heard animals dying in the dark. He walked the brush of his property with a flashlight looking for tracks until the sky started to lighten, knowing on some level that he wouldn't find anything. Waiting for the dawn on shaking legs because it was better than sleepwalking.

It didn't take long to track down the online conversations between Marcus and a suspect who was likely the Marionette Murderer. The techies cracked open his computer and out came a history of forum posts, email chains, and direct twitter messages. There was a lot to sort through, but Will had

been correct that Marcus had met an online friend the night he died. He had been emailing this person for nearly two years in chains so long scrolling down lead to poorly formatted messages, one character per line, and their computer woman Beckett ranted at Will for ten minutes about how much she hated this email provider. The Marionette Murderer's email was gran4mii@hotmail.com and she signed each email *ii*.

Will wrote the username over and over on the utterly useless handout given to him during one of Jack's meetings. There was no way a serial killer would hunt with a username that had no meaning, especially a killer this theatrical. However, the meaning of the cryptic gran4mii was evading Will. Gran as in grandma? Not that she would be that old. Gran x 4 = gran gran gran gran. Gran as in Esztergom, Germany? As in the Spanish word for 'great'? 4 as in the fourth letter of the alphabet, D, granD, grand for me. M2, MB, m x 2 = marionette murderer? But of course the username had been around long before Freddie Lounds thought up her brilliant nickname. Will filled the margins with pairs of i's, like pairs of figures, the self doubled.

"Anything to add, Will?" Jack said, and by his tone Will inferred that it was the second time he was being asked.

Will shrugged. "She might be hispanic," Will said, scribbling another column of ii's.

"Is that all that you've gleaned from their emails?" Jack asked, obviously growing irritated with Will's distracted air.

"No, Jack," Will replied, removing his glasses to pinch the bridge of his nose. "I've gleaned that Miss Roman Numeral Two has been killing or thinking about killing for as long as these email exchanges at least, so that's 20 months, during which time she crafted multiple online personas to seek connections with young, vulnerable people. I can tell you that we are not going to find much in these emails that tells us definitive facts about the Marionette Murderer, because it was all about Marcus, she crafted everything she said for him, and she's a tree hiding in a forest of her own making."

"Then give me a way to see through the woods, Will."

God, his headache was killing him. “Using the internet as a hunting ground means she’s young, probably a snake person. She’s smart, and manipulative, and she’s spent years entertaining herself by manipulating johns and people online, and when that stopped being satisfying she made her manipulations physical.”

“We should call her the Catfish Killer,” Price suggested.

“The Tinder… Tightrope?” Zeller tried.

“You said she saw herself in Marcus,” Jack said, ignoring Zeller and Price. “What did she see in him?”

“They met on a forum for survivors of childhood abuse,” Beverly added, looking at Will. “They were both abused, and turned to sex work as a way of controlling what happened to them.”

“That’s certainly a story that makes sense,” Will said, returning to dot his ii’s.

“You don’t think she was abused?” Beverly asked, raising an eyebrow.

“It’s possible,” Will admitted. “Hardly matters now. She doesn’t care about that. It’s unthinkable that she could be touched by another human in a significant way. She’s beyond it.” He frowned down at his paper. ii. i’s. Eyes. Catching her prey in an image of eyes. “She thinks she’s a god,” he said, quietly.

“Well, she’s not,” Jack said. "She’s flesh and blood, just like us, which means she’s made mistakes before and she’ll make them again, and we’ll catch her.”

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Will read through all the emails with a faint feeling of dread. The more he read, the less he saw. He googled every combination of "gran4mii" "grand for me" "gran4" etc and came up with exactly nothing useful. He gave a half hearted lecture on the Marionette Murderer, and just for the hell of it, told his students to analyze some of the emails.

And then they found the body at the concert hall, and Garett Jacob Hobbs clapped at the show.

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Of course Hannibal knew about classic techniques for producing cat gut. Will heard the sound Douglas Wilson made reverberating in his body like he was the one filled with strings, stretched and oiled and plucked to play the music of the dead. Of course he was filled with strings; even with this new case to distract him, the Marionette Murderer was tangled up inside. Will wondered, bizarrely, what she would think of the human instrument.

"I can hear what he was playing behind my eyes, when I close them," Will said.

Hannibal inclined his head. "What do you see behind closed eyes?"

Will closed his eyes experimentally. The splotchy red patterns of light on his eyelids, a tangle of threads and fishing line, and the swinging light of a metronome. Blood and mirrors and antlers. He didn't quite know how to answer, and then he arrived at the one that felt right. "I see myself," Will said.

Hannibal considered this, studying Will in his attentive, meticulous way. For a moment Will thought they would jump into another poetic conversation about the nature of mirrors and reflection and seeing, but when Hannibal finally spoke he asked, "You said the killer was performing. Who was he performing for?"

"I don’t know," Will replied. "Patron of the arts. Fellow musician. Or another killer."

"It’s a serenade," Hannibal observed.

"One night only." Will grinned morbidly.

"No repeat performance?"

Will shook his head. "This isn’t how he kills. How he kills, he doesn’t get caught."

"You believe he risked getting caught for a serenade?"

"I believe he wants to show someone how well he plays."

Hannibal leaned back in his chair. "Intriguing."

Will cocked his head. "Is it? Are you intrigued?"

Hannibal tapped his fingers on the arms of the chair, considering. "The desire to be seen is a powerful one," Hannibal said. "If this killer is only now stepping into the spotlight, perhaps he has finally found someone worthy of seeing him."

Will smiled. "I see him. Can't imagine he was serenading me. I don't have the ear for it."

"And yet you hear the music," Hannibal said. "You see many killers, and many of them want desperately to be seen."

Will shrugged. "I'm the one who can."

Hannibal's smile was small and enigmatic, filled with a warmth that was entirely inappropriate to the discussion of serial killers; but Will knew they were talking about themselves. Every conversation they had, on some level, was about the shape that existed between them. "How would you serenade me?" Will asked, teasingly.

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"For what it was," Hannibal amended.

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Hannibal looked slightly ridiculous standing on a small ladder in the middle of his bedroom, even if he was securing a long chain to a weight-bearing hook in his ceiling. Will hadn’t noticed the suspension point before, though it was possible he had missed it; there was a lot to catch the eye in Hannibal Lecter’s bedroom, and the hook in the ceiling was relatively covert. Will watched Hannibal secure the chain with a faint look of amusement on his face, thinking that the entire set up would be better with inch thick metal cable. Chains were fine, but they rattled, they didn't vibrate with deadly force like a subterranean beast shaking the very foundation of the earth. Chains couldn't be adjusted as precisely; they wouldn't haul Will smoothly into a canopy of swaying corpses. He definitely was not going to tell Hannibal his preference -- *hey, how about instead you use a murder weapon of this serial killer I'm obsessed with?* Instead, Will imagined what kind of rig would be needed to suspend him like a puppet, cords on his wrists and ankles to be pulled as Hannibal pleased, something around his torso to actually take the weight. He yanked on a curl of hair.

"Why a chain?" Will asked. Ugh, fuck, of course right after he decided not to talk to Hannibal about murderous material choices, he went and said something anyway.

Hannibal finished latching the chain and looked down at Will. "Different tools for different purposes," he said enigmatically, descending the ladder. “Rope for your skin, and chains to keep you in your place.”

And wires to make me dance, Will thought, nearly rolling his eyes. Hannibal leaned the ladder in the corner. It was actually surprising that he didn’t set everything up before Will arrived, or didn’t ask Will to wait until the room was ready for him. Hannibal was totally unselfconscious about preparing their ‘evening activities’. Will wondered if it was to make him feel more comfortable (unlikely), or to build the anticipation (probably), or if Hannibal simply did not care (there it was). Hannibal looked as natural stringing up a chain for Will as he did choosing wine. “What’s in store for me tonight?” Will asked.

“I rather like surprising you,” Hannibal said with a faint smile. “Is there anything in particular you want?”

Will thought of catgut strings and marionettes, touching his throat unconsciously. He shrugged. “Not… particularly.”

Hannibal nodded, as if Will had said something very wise. “Undress yourself,” Hannibal instructed.

Will did so, stripping everything off, including his boxers. He no longer felt strange being naked in front of Hannibal — when had that happened? It had seemed like a line to be crossed, but now on the other side, Will regarded his prior hesitation with amusement. He folded his clothes and placed them on the day bed, which was adjusted from it’s usual position. It was near the bed, facing the mirror, and the chain dangled in between the two. Hannibal gathered his supplies: the leather hand cuffs, a harness clip, the old medical bag, and a black crop. Will watched him out of the corner of his eye as he stroked the metal joints of the chain. Either Hannibal hadn’t decided what he wanted to do tonight, or he didn’t want Will to know exactly what was going to be done to him. The crop, though, that was new; it was too long to fit into the medical bag.

Hannibal walked up to Will and took both his wrists, thumbing over the bones of his knuckles, and the scabs from the fishing hooks. He clasped Will’s wrists in the leather cuffs, checked the tightness, and bade Will lift his arms over his head. Hannibal stepped very close then, reaching up to clip the cuffs to the chain, and Will could feel his breath on his face and knew he could feel the same. “Higher,” Hannibal said, and Will stretched up with his arms until they were straining. With a metallic *click*, the cuffs were clipped to the chain.

Hannibal didn’t step away at once. He brushed a hand down Will’s side, looking down at him through pale lashes. Will’s back was arched, not with desperation to be near Hannibal, but because of his arms. “How does it feel?” Hannibal asked quietly, so close he was a blur.

“It’s a stretch,” Will admitted, going onto his toes to relieve some of the strain, and to brush his lips near Hannibal’s. “Not sure how long I can hold it.”

Hannibal squeezed his hip once, and took a step back to admire him. Will tested the bounds of his restraints — he could twist himself left and right, but if he actually took a step to the side his shoulders really started to ache. He bent his knees, taking some of the weight on the cuffs; that would cut off his blood flow, and the stiff leather pinched his skin. Hannibal watched all of this with delight. Will rolled his shoulders, and stared back at him.

"I would like very much to draw you like this," Hannibal said in a low voice. Curious that he said anything at all instead of simply picking up his paper and pencil. There was something gentle about the confession.

"Well I'm not going to stop you," Will said, cocking his head.

Hannibal didn't say anything further. He fetched the drawing pad from the bedside table and sat on the day bed, looking at Will carefully for some minutes before placing pencil on paper.

"I've seen some of your drawings," Will said, shifting on his feet. "You're a talented artist."

"A skilled draftsman," Hannibal corrected in a surprising gesture of modesty. "I lack the passion and creativity necessary to make real art. I recreate what I see or remember."

Will frowned. "That's not quite right, though. You are creative, I can see it in your cooking."

Hannibal smiles. "I can make arrangements," he conceded. "But that's different from imagination."

"Well, I can't draw for shit." Will's arms were starting to go numb. He shifted on one foot and then the other, and felt a bead of sweat slip between his shoulder blades.

"I would like you to try," Hannibal said, again making his desires known as a pseudo questioning offers: I would like this of you, would you like to give it to me? "It would be enlightening to see what your untrained hand could produce from the well of your imagination."

"My hands are currently occupied."

"So they are."

Will closed his eyes, and listened to the delicate scratch of pencil on paper. The muscles of his arms, shoulders, and back were aching, punctuated by numbing pins traveling down from his wrists. "Many of the killers I look at are -- think they're artists," Will said. "They want recognition, and that's why so many of them get caught. Our musician has probably been killing for years and would have continued to do so if he hadn't found his audience. It's almost romantic."

"Is it?" Hannibal asked, attention on his drawing.

"No. Not really." Will groaned slightly, and rested his head against his arms to try to relieve some of the tension in his neck. Something about that change in pose got Hannibal's attention, and he stared fixedly before taking up his eraser. "It's just -- it's a gift," Will said. "An entreaty. *See me*. Look at how well I play."

"Seeing is an act of compassion," Hannibal said. "Or devotion."

"I guess if it's romantic it's the hackneyed kind of romance that drives people to murder in movies and bad love songs."

"Is that why you asked me about my serenade?" Hannibal teased.

"Oh yes. I saw the corpse in the concert hall and thought 'if only Hannibal would seduce me like this!'"

"My exquisite cooking has not been sufficiently seductive?"

Will laughed. "Oh, no, not even close," he jested. "I have very particular tastes. You're not getting a kiss until you make me a human kazoo."

Hannibal chuckled, pausing from his drawing to give Will a faintly mischievous look. "What body part would you like fashioned into your kazoo?"

"Skin flute."

"Vulgar, aren't you. That absolutely would not work, did you skip your anatomy classes?"

Will grinned. "Guess I'll have to take a make up class, professor."

Hannibal smirked. His drawing hand was all practiced and precise movements, not so different than the decisive gestures of surgery. When Hannibal spoke again, it was still in a jesting tone, but slow and considering. "But our romance would not be so cliché as to drive me to murder."

"Oh?" Will was numb to his elbows now. He flexed his fingers, and painful needles erupted from his hands.

"No," Hannibal said. "I rather think ours would be the sort of romance that tore whole countries apart with war and bloodshed."

"Am I Helen of Troy?" Will asked.

"You are very beautiful."

Will bit back the automatic denial. He really didn't want Hannibal to start waxing poetic about him when he couldn't get away, and when Hannibal was paying such close attention to his body. Will swallowed. "I don't know. I think ours would be the sort that drove us to the depths of the underworld. Orpheus and Eurydice."

"Persephone and Hades," Hannibal suggested. "Or Gilgamesh and Enkidu."

"Defying the laws of death and nature," Will said theatrically. "That's the sort of romance we would have."

They were joking, of course. Playful banter cached safely in the 'would' of their theoretical romance and the absurdity of courting through crime scenes. What was between them wasn't romantic in the slightest. It was utilitarian, and slightly taboo, and private; utterly outside the usual bounds of romance. "Who drags who to the underworld?" Hannibal asked, and there was no indication of anything beyond playful conversation. And yet, Will felt it: a shadow on the other side of them, as of yet unseen.

"Well," Will said, rising briefly on his toes to roll his neck and shoulders. "I know you're the dominant one, but you are absolutely Persephone in this metaphor."

Hannibal didn't object. "Am I?"

"I'm the one who drags you down into the underworld," Will said. "But you show me the way."

Their eyes met. Will was dizzy for a moment. They were both caught in their mutual gaze, object and reflection multiplying indefinitely, and Will felt all that he didn't see in Hannibal like a weight tied around his neck. See and be seen. Become the image of the other and capture it in your

likeness. Drawings of eyes. *Don't turn around and look at me, don't you dare.* Nothing happened and it was so much. Hannibal put his pencil down.

"You would certainly be Enkidu to my Gilgamesh," Hannibal said, standing up. He rubbed his hands together briefly, and then turned to pick up the crop. He smoothed it between his hands, and flicked his palm lightly with the square of leather. "Though I wonder if you are not more Inanna and I Ereshkigal."

"Not familiar with that one," Will mumbled, eyes on the crop.

Hannibal stepped forward, eyes alight with something dangerous that made Will shiver. He placed the end of the crop delicately on Will's chest, above his heart. "A Sumerian epic, Inanna's Descent," Hannibal explained. "The goddess of heaven Inanna goes to the underworld to visit her recently widowed sister, Ereshkigal, Queen of the Underworld."

"How does a Queen of the Underworld become a widow?" Will asked, as Hannibal ran the crop down his chest and to his naval. "What's it mean when a King of the Underworld dies?"

"Quite," Hannibal replied. He moved so quickly that Will felt the sting on this thigh before he registered that Hannibal had flicked the crop. He bit his lip. It didn't hurt that much. "The myth is fascinating for it's contradictions. Reflections, replacements." Hannibal slowly prowled around Will, until he was behind him. "Inanna has come to the entrance of the Underworld for the funeral rights, but Ereshkigal does not seem to want her. She shuts the seven gates of the underworld to her sister."

The crop cracked against his back and Will tensed. Hannibal resumed stroking motions with the end of the crop, trailing the contours of Will's back and thighs. "Inanna descends through the layers of the Underworld," Hannibal continues, "and at each gate she is made to strip away part of her garments. Her crown —"

Smack.

"Her beads."

Smack.

"Her ring."

Smack.

"Her measuring rod."

Smack.

"Her pala dress."

Smack.

Will gasped. His skin felt hot, each sting of the crop radiating out into warm sensitivity. Each individual slap was nothing he couldn't handle, but the culmination was starting to hurt.

"When Inanna asks why she must be subject to these indignities," Hannibal continued, voice low and vaguely hypnotic, "The gatekeepers say 'the ways of the underworld are perfect. They may not

be questioned.'"

Hannibal took the crop to Will when he didn't expect it, and the anticipation was what really started to agitate him. Light trails of leather on skin made Will tense as if he'd just been hit. When there was nothing on his skin, Will felt each pause between Hannibal's words like an inevitable blow, worse when it didn't come, relieving when it did. The pain was building slowly.

"When Inanna finally arrives at the throne room, she is naked and bowed low." Hannibal struck Will higher on his back, and he cried out, squirming. He bit the inside of his lip.

"Inanna then takes the place of Ereshkigal on her throne," Hannibal continued, "and the seven judges of the underworld render their decision against her. They look at Inanna, and it is the look of death."

Smack.

"They speak at her, and it is the voice of anger."

Smack.

"They shout at her, and it is the shout of guilt."

Will flinched, waiting for the blow to fall. It didn't. Hannibal stood very still behind him, Will couldn't even hear him breathe. Hannibal waited until the muscles of Will's back had relaxed somewhat before saying, "She has been judged."

Hannibal laid into him with a series of hits to his backside, rhythmic and relentless, until Will screamed with each one. Hannibal caressed the red, inflamed skin with his fingers, and Will hissed in pain. "Inanna turns into a corpse," Hannibal said thoughtfully. "And the corpse is strung up on a hook."

"Oh, god," Will breathed. He felt like he was hanging on by a thread, barely standing. Hannibal hit him again, hard, and Will tasted blood in his mouth. Then lighter smacks, stinging and building up to something great and terrible. Will saw himself hung by a meat hook so large it pierced his chest, scrambling to grab onto something to haul himself free, but of course he couldn't — the metal was slick with his blood, and the barbed end made his escape impossible. The only thing he could do is try to keep himself still as the chain he hung upon swayed.

Will's head was filling with fog. Hannibal's voice seemed distant and so did his own cries, like his ears were plugged and he heard everything by the vibrations of his body. Still, Hannibal continued, telling the myth and bruising Will's body. "Hurts," Will hissed. There were tears in his eyes.

"Do you want me to stop?" Hannibal asked curiously.

Will shook his head. "Just… give me a minute."

Hannibal didn't. He smacked the red skin just below Will's ass until it bruised, and Will lurched forward, nearly losing his footing. He tried to get away but the pain screamed through his arms, and he gasped, tears spilling down his face. "Wait, please —" Will begged. "Stop. I can't — can't take any more."

"The fact that you can still speak suggests otherwise," Hannibal said calmly.

“Oh god.”

“The story’s not over with, Will.”

Smack.

Will’s vision went white for a moment with the pain. He was scrambling on a hook. He was tied up in a web of razor wire. The word ‘obsidian’ was on the tip of his tongue. He could end this. Was Hannibal waiting for him to end this, or would he know somehow when Will had reached his limit? No, he would know, but the question was: would Hannibal stop once they got there? Did Will want him to?

“Inana's servant sends two demons down to rescue her. When they reach the throne room of the underworld, they find Ereshkigal in a most unusual state of distress,” Hannibal continued. “She is in the throws of labor. The demons sympathize with her pain, and she offers them a gift. They say that they only want the corpse hanging upon the hook.”

Smack.

Will’s legs actually did give out at that, and he hung from his wrists. The pain was excruciating — white hot needles, numbness warring with pain. Will wondered vaguely if he would feel it if he tore a muscle. Hannibal was close to him suddenly, one arm wrapped around his waist to take some of the weight. Will gasped for breath. Hannibal’s voice was low and quiet against his ear but it filled his entire body.

“Ereshkigal says to the demons, ‘That is the corpse of your queen’, and they reply ‘whether that is the corpse of our king or our queen, give it to us.’ So the demons retrieve Inanna, but she cannot leave the underworld unless someone takes her place.” Hannibal kissed Will’s neck.

Will’s head hung low. He let out soft whimpers as Hannibal put him back on his feet, trembling and swaying slightly but somehow staying upright. “Good,” Hannibal said. “Do you feel like a corpse?”

Will didn’t answer. Hannibal stepped in front of him, and tilted his chin up so he could see his face. Will’s eyes were soft-focused, his breathing ragged. He was likely reaching the edge of his tolerance. Good.

Hannibal continued the story, striking Will occasionally to keep him in the semi-conscious state. He didn’t have to hit hard; just enough stimulation to keep him this side of sobbing and broken. “One cannot simply leave the Underworld. Death demands repayment," Hannibal said. "The two demons escort Inanna out of the underworld, and now must find her surrogate. They find her servant at the entrance and the demons say ‘give her to the underworld in your place’, but Inanna refuses. The servant has been loyal. They proceed towards the city. Servants of Inanna throw themselves at her feet, and again the demons say ‘we will take them back to the Underworld’ and again, Inanna refuses.

“Then they find Dumuzi, Inanna’s husband, sitting on a throne beneath an apple tree dressed in finery and feasting. Dumuzi is not mourning her death. She looks at him, and it is the gaze of death. She speaks to him, and it is the speech of anger. She shouts at him, and it is the shout of guilt. She instructs him to be taken in her place. The demons seize him by the thighs.

“When Dumuzi is taken to the underworld, Inanna cries bitterly for her husband.”

Hannibal stepped in front of Will. The man was swaying on his feet, drenched in sweat, and his eyes were clouded by pain. Hannibal glanced in the mirror behind Will and admired the marks on him. “I wish you could see how beautiful you are right now,” Hannibal said, cupping Will’s cheek. “Nearly broken, hanging on by the merest thread. Can you hear me, Will?”

Will didn’t respond. His eyes were open, but unfocused. “I think you can, all the same,” Hannibal purred. “Like my voice is coming to you from somewhere deep inside you. Like I am in your head. Were you truly unable to stop, or did you wish to be pushed too far? I could ask the same of myself.” He kissed Will on his slack mouth. “Nod if you can hear me.”

Will nodded, a slight movement.

“Say my name,” Hannibal instructed.

“Hannibal Lecter,” Will slurred.

"What is your name?"

"Will Graham."

“Why was Ereshkigal pregnant?” Hannibal asked.

No expression crossed his face as Will processed the question. If only Hannibal could follow Will into those depths. “Death,” Will replied.

“Very good, Will.” Hannibal smiled. “I believe you’ve entered something of a dissociative state. You are likely highly suggestible now. I would apologize for pushing you this far, but I do not wish to lie. Right now, we can be honest with each other, and so we must. Are you listening, Will?”

Will nodded.

“Good. I will attempt to rouse you from this state. I am going to count back from ten, and then tell you to awaken. When I do, you will come back to yourself — your body and awareness — and you will not remember this conversation. Do you understand?”

Will nodded again.

Hannibal smiled. "But first..." He leaned into Will, and breathed nightmares into his skin.

o o o o o o o o o o

Will went to visit Abigail on his own, which he hadn’t done before; previously he was always accompanied with Hannibal or Alana. On the drive over he nearly turned around, convinced that Abigail couldn’t want to see just him. Well, if she didn’t, it would be plain to Will, and he would leave. That minor anxiety was overshadowed by the one that drove him to the psychiatric hospital — the anxiety that he was running out of time.

Abigail looked well, all things considered. She had a soft, purple scarf drawn around her neck, and there was a bit of color to her skin. She also looked incredibly bored and irritated, so much so that

she brightened when Will entered.

“Oh thank god,” Abigail said, “I’m going out of my mind with boredom.”

“Hello to you too,” Will said with a smile. They sat together at a small table by a window, which had a checkers game atop. Abigail started stacking the pieces into a tower. “How are you?” Will asked.

Abigail sighed heavily. “If I have to go to another fucking — group therapy session,” she said, stuttering over the curse word with a glance at Will before charging ahead, “I’m going to *fucking* lose it.”

“That bad, huh?” Will started stacking the checkers on his side as well.

“It’s so tedious. They keep gently encouraging me to open up and it makes me want to take a vow of silence. It’s all so —“ She gestured wildly. “I don’t know. Sad. It’s sad. And exhausting.”

“It can be… difficult to listen to other people’s traumas,” Will said. Abigail glared at him, and he raised his palms in surrender. “Right, okay, you’ve probably heard it all before.”

Abigail nodded. “It just feels like there’s a script I’m expected to follow: here’s what you say, here’s how you heal, and none of it works for me. I don’t fit the victim mold.”

Will prodded his checkers tower, and it swayed on the board. He glanced at her chin, still not able to make eye contact with her (maybe never), and said, “No, I suppose you don’t.”

Abigail tipped her checkers tower over, and they spilled everywhere. Will picked up one of hers and flipped it between his knuckles, an old trick his father taught him. Abigail narrowed her eyes. “How do you do that?”

Will taught her. It was easier with the large checker pieces than with a quarter, but he fished one out of his wallet anyway and showed off a bit.

“So, what’s up with you?” Abigail asked, concentrating on the checker between her fingers, dropping it with a soft curse. “Why did you come alone?”

It was an innocent enough question, and the answers Will had were certainly not. He had a sinking feeling that if Abigail saw himself and Hannibal together she might start asking the wrong questions, and if Alana was there as well — god. Will did not want to invite that scrutiny. “They don’t know I’m here," Will replied with a shrug. "Is it weird that I came here alone?"

"This whole situation is weird," Abigail replied. "So... I suppose it's not weird at all."

Will smiled, staring at the rim of his glasses. "I'm glad you tolerate my company."

Abigail nodded, and tucked a finger inside her scarf as if to scratch an itch; then, becoming self conscious, she started fidgeting with the checkers again. "How well do you know Hannibal?" she asked, trying to make it sound casual, which Will found endearing even as he wondered why she wanted Will's opinion of the man.

"We're friends," Will said, and Abigail shot him a look the screamed 'no shit, Sherlock'. Will looked away. "I don't think he's the sort of man one could know well," Will eventually said. "Not in the usual sense. He's a very guarded person."

"Like us."

Will looked at her, just between the eyes, and she broke eye contact almost immediately. *Us*. The word made Will's chest ache. "I don't feel very guarded," he admired with a weak smile. "I just feel like I'm... being sieged."

"Is there a difference?" Abigail asked.

"Yeah. I think there is."

Abigail mulled that over, staring out the window at the grey sky. "Do you trust him?"

Will paused. Hannibal must have come on his own, and whatever interaction they had made Abigail examine her relationship with Hannibal; whether it was a new intimacy they shared, or lack thereof. “Do you trust Hannibal?” Will asked, curiosity plain.

“I’m asking you,” Abigail said.

“Fair.” Will’s mouth twisted into a half-smile. “I suppose it depends on how you define trust. I can predict what Hannibal will do in some situations, and I trust him to act within certain parameters. But there’s a lot I can’t predict about him.”

“Is that what trust is to you?” Abigail asked. “Being able to predict what people will do?”

“I may have some trust issues,” Will replied with a self-deprecating grin.

“Join the club. I think trust is sort of the opposite of what you’re saying though. You trust someone to be good to you when you can’t predict that they will. Even when you think they could hurt you.” She leaned back in her chair, crossing her arms over her chest with one hand at her collarbone, protective.

Will glanced at her face. There was a tightness to her eyes. “Did you trust your father?” Will asked.

Her fingers twitched. Will could see the struggle in her features, subtle shifts beneath the surface. “That’s the problem, isn’t it? I don’t know. When I think back, all I can see is… who he really was.”

It was curious that she didn’t answer his question, but Will was just glad that Abigail felt alright talking about her father with him. “Hindsight is 20/20,” Will said. “Knowing what he did now isn’t the same as having been able to predict him, and failing to do so.”

“I don’t know if I’m ever going to be able to trust a man again,” Abigail said with a tight shrug. “Sorry,” she added, sparing Will a glance.

Will shook his head. “Don’t be. Trauma rewrites everything. Whatever trust was to you before, it will be different now.”

Abigail looked at him square on, brows furrowed. “You know a lot about trauma, were you ever —"

Will stiffened.

Abigail gasped, covering her mouth. “I’m sorry, what a fucking stupid — you don’t have to answer that.”

Will held up a hand, eyes low. “It’s okay,” he said quickly. “I don’t…” His voice trailed off. Hannibal certainly thought that Will was traumatized, and Will certainly had some of the symptoms of PTSD. On the books, Will was cleared. As far as the record went, Will had never been diagnosed with *anything*. “What I do could be considered traumatizing,” Will said carefully. “And what we went through was a trauma, for all three of us. But before that, no, I haven’t been traumatized.”

“Ok.” Abigail smiled tightly, pushing the checkers pieces around the board.

“That doesn’t mean I don’t understand it well,” Will added. “I’ve worked with traumatized people before. Studied them. I can understand anyone.”

They both looked out the window. In the garden below, patients were wandering in pairs with the staff or guests. The sky was a flat grey, neither threatening a storm nor allowing the sun through. It was like purgatory.

“I want to trust him,” Abigail said quietly.

“Yeah. Me too.” Will ran his hands through his hair. “By your definition of trust, I would say that I act as if I trust Hannibal, even if I don’t.”

“What do you mean?”

Will smiled, softly this time. “Where he can’t be predicted, where he could hurt me, I put myself in his hands. I’m waiting to see if he will.”

o o o o o o o o o o

Will sat in front of his desk, bent before the magnifying glass and tying a feather to his lure. As he pulled the knot closed, he heard the vibration of the fishing wire like claws raking down his bones. He dropped the needle nose pliers in frustration. He could hear it — cords plucked, the haunting reverberation of horse hair against human gut string. How could sound hurt so acutely? Will clasped his hands over his ears, digging his nails into his scalp. The music faded.

And then, scratching. Will felt the noise against his spine. It wasn’t in his head. He stood up and looked around the room, but whatever he was hearing, it wasn’t disturbing the dogs. It wasn’t in his head — Will knew when he heard something in his imagination, he *knew*.

Will crossed over to the front door and stepped out onto the porch, listening. For a moment there was nothing. Just Will and the dark, stretching out in every direction, tight, like a thread waiting to be plucked.

Chapter End Notes

what do we think about Hannibal as Ereshkigal, pregnant with the void? there's a truly terrible a/b/o fic in that premise somewhere. Hannibal, why would you cast yourself as such a passive character? just to strip Will of everything and hang him up on a hook? I love that myth SO MUCH GUYS.

I love cursing Abigail. I'm still figuring out what I'm going to do with her, she deserves something spectacular.

I'm tempted to write more hypno-kink stuff but I also don't want you to know exactly what Hannibal is seeding in Will's fevered mind until it unfurls. maybe a truly debauched interlude?

Drawing Lines, Crossing Lines

Chapter Summary

He was looking at Hannibal, and Hannibal was staring at him dispassionately. Will really had hurt him. He could see it in the way Hannibal let nothing show. Will felt like he had been punched in the gut.

Will took a cautious step forward. "Hannibal, I--"

"Destruction as a means of defining something amorphous," Hannibal mused, standing very still. In fact, he hadn't moved at all since Will had told him. "I applaud you your inventiveness."

o o o o o o o o o o

Will makes a mistake. He and Hannibal draw lines in their relationship, and Will thinks about throwing himself on those wires.

Chapter Notes

this is your friendly reminder that Will and Hannibal are not explicitly negotiating all of their scenes, which is not a safe way to practice BDSM, because they are fundamentally not safe people. just having a safe word is not sufficient! Hannibal is a megalomaniac who thinks he always knows best, and Will is self destructive (in this fic). this is not your how-to-guide :)

get ready for a bit of drama. did I mention that Will is self-destructive?

also, there's a a weird kink in this chapter. let me know what you think >:3

cw: violent intrusive thoughts (including non-con), biting, safe word use

tumblr

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The hole in Will's chimney gaped wide like a maw. He felt slightly unhinged staring at it, like the animal he had heard scratching in the chimney had instead been clawing inside his chest, and he had broken himself to get at it. Ribs cracked open instead of stone hammered in. He would clean the chimney out thoroughly and replace the riverstone, maybe rebuild the entire thing while he was at it to give his hands something to do, install a deeper mantelpiece.

Alana stood behind him. She had appeared at his porch with a genial smile that faded into concern upon seeing Will's disheveled state. No, not just covered in grime from fixing boat motors this time. Alana was well put-together as always, looking vibrant in a red coat and with her rich brown hair partially tied up. Natural makeup, soft features, willing to let others underestimate her because of her beauty and gentle mannerisms. Will knew better. Will had seen Alana go toe-to-toe with Jack Crawford.

Alana stared at the busted open chimney and then Will. “What kind of animal was it?” she asked.

Will wrenched his eyes away from the hole, but couldn’t bring himself to look at Alana yet, so he cast his eyes about the house, brushing the dust on his trousers. “Might have been a raccoon,” he muttered.

“Might have been?” Alana asked.

Will nearly flinched. She didn’t believe him. Of course she didn’t; he didn’t believe it himself. He had heard the animal clearly, outside of his head, so it hadn’t been an obsessive thought. Maybe the borders of his mind were expanding. “By the time I knocked a hole in the chimney, it crawled out the top,” Will said by way of an explanation. He could feel Alana watching him, surreptitiously, but eyes he could feel nonetheless.

“Well, at least it got out,” Alana said in a low voice.

Will glanced at her, finally meeting her eyes. “What are you doing out?”

Her eyebrows raised. Her face always seemed open and observant. Even knowing how Will could read people, she didn’t mask herself, not exactly. “Abigail told me that you visited her,” Alana said. “I thought I’d drop by on my way home.” *I'm here for a reason but I also wanted to check up on you.*

“Your timing is rather disastrous,” Will said with a smirk. He wandered over to the chimney and rested the hammer on the mantle, puzzlement crossing his features. “You avoided being in a room alone with me, essentially, since I met you.” He chuckled, self deprecative, and turned back to her. “I mean, you were smooth about it.”

Alana glanced down, not denying it. “Evidently not smoothly enough.”

She was no longer afraid — or uncomfortable — being alone with him. It wasn’t just that. Will had noticed that Alana would stand closer to him than she would have before. Before what? Before he had killed a man, before he started wearing the skin of killers standing amongst the blood and death, before she became concerned. He stepped closer now, testing the bounds. “Now you’re making house calls,” he said, glancing back at the hole in his wall. Fuck, there hadn’t been an animal, had there?

“Just a drive-by, on my way home,” Alana said in a quiet voice, and when Will glanced back at her he caught her staring at his lips. “Since you’re not my patient.”

Will froze, breath stuttering. They had never been this close before. Heat rose in his neck, and he had the sudden urge to slap himself. Oh god. He hadn’t thought about Alana like that since he shot Hobbs, but the crush was old and worn into him, a feeling he noticed occasionally and buried deep inside himself, only to be brought out to flagellate himself if he was feeling particularly self-deprecative. Will took a half step back and tilted his head away, brows furrowed. “No, I’m not,” he

replied tensely. *Not like how I'm Hannibal's patient, who shouldn't have more than a professional curiosity.*

“Are… are you seeing someone?”

Will glanced back, and Alana was looking at his collar. The buttons of his shirt were undone, and just peeking out from under the fabric was a livid hickey. Will blushed furiously, and tugged at his shirt to cover it. He shrugged, feeling supremely awkward. “Sort of.”

Alana took a half step back, appraising him.

“What?” Will asked, looking anywhere but at Alana. “Are you surprised?”

“A bit,” Alana admitted. “You just don’t seem like you date.”

Will smiled, trying to rescue the awkward moment with some humor. “Too broken to date,” he said, meaning it as a joke, but it came out too raw.

“You’re not broken,” Alana said.

“It’s not… dating.” Will’s voice was bitter. God, he didn’t want Alana to know. If she found out that he was seeing Hannibal, she would be furious. *You’re not my patient*. And Hannibal wasn’t his psychiatrist, not technically, but that would hardly matter to her. And if she knew what they did… Will covered his face for a moment. He needed a cover story. Alana was looking at him with both eyebrows raised. “It’s —“ Will began. “Casual.”

“It’s none of my business,” Alana said. There was disappointment in her voice.

Will straightened up. “Do you want it to be?” he asked, genuinely curious.

Alana faltered. She actually blushed. “I’m… just worried about you,” she said. “If there was someone in your life, I would want you to have that. I like the idea of you being happy.” She smiled.

Will stepped forward, looking down at her face. He wasn’t happy. He was broken, all shards of glass meant to cut and not caress, and he was reckless, and self-destructive, and so fucking lonely. He brushed her cheek. Fuck. He was going to ruin this.

Will kissed her, slow and careful, like cutting into his thigh, cutting past barriers. After a moment she opened up to him. God, it felt so good, softer and gentler than kissing Hannibal.

Hannibal.

Will wrenched himself away, taking a step back and knotting his fist in his hair. “I’m. Sorry.” His throat was tense. “We shouldn’t.”

“No,” Alana said slowly, shocked by his gentle kiss and his violent change of mind. He couldn’t look at her. “You’re right. We shouldn’t.” She waited for Will to look back at her, and he refused, his breathing rapid, his whole body tense. “I'm sorry, Will. I was confused, but that's not why I came here."

Will nodded, grimacing. "Yeah, I know. Sorry to... confuse you."

"I’m going to see myself out,” she said, and Will let her.

Fuck.

ooooooooooo

Will's mind was ablaze as he drove to Baltimore, turning desperate circles around imagined conversations; how Will could be despondent, or apologetic, or coldly aloof; and Hannibal might be furious, or impersonal, or understanding. And, because he couldn't help it, his mind went to the darkest corner it could find: how Hannibal would punish him, or rage against him, locking him up in his basement so that Will would never again have the opportunity to kiss someone. Absurd fantasies that made his heart race. He wanted to punch his leg but didn't, let that tension simmer inside. Will fantasized about being locked in a cell with Hannibal. Hannibal would be bound by a metal collar around his neck that bolted to the wall, plastic ties around his wrists, sitting on the filthy floor in one of his expensive suits. And he would be forced to watch as Will... as Will...

Instead of having time to collect his thoughts and figure out what to say to Hannibal, when he arrived as his house he was in an acute state of distress. The snow was falling steadily, and he stomped up to the door, jaw clenched and fists pushed deep into his coat pockets. God, he was going to ruin this.

Hannibal opened the door, and looked surprised to see Will. Before he could utter a greeting, Will pushed past him, shedding his frost-coveted coat. "I fucked up," he said. "I fucked up so bad."

Hannibal actually looked surprised. "Well, come in."

Will headed towards the kitchen, clenching and un-clenching his fists. His pulse was thudding in his head. He passed by the dining room and noted the table setting. "You have company?" he asked, with an absurd pang of jealousy.

"A colleague," Hannibal explained. "You just missed him."

"Left his dinner," Will observed, running a shaking hand through his hair. He sighed deeply and clenched his eyes shut, and then entered the kitchen. Hannibal was speaking but Will could barely hear him over the rush of blood in his ears.

"...Fortunate for you, since I have desert for two."

Will watched Hannibal retrieve a tray from the oven with mounting horror. "Hannibal." Will's voice was shaking.

Hannibal glanced up at him and saw the distress on his face. He set the tray down, carefully removing the oven mitt, and gave Will his full attention. "What has happened?" Hannibal asked.

Will looked around the kitchen. He would have to look at Hannibal for this, needed to see his reaction, but it was so difficult. His gaze was like a fly flittering around the kitchen, waiting to find its perch. Will knew where to land. He looked at Hannibal and met his eyes, and the shame was so

great that he almost looked away. He smiled; nothing was funny, but reflexively his body needed to communicate that he wasn't dying. He wet his lips.

"I kissed Alana Bloom," Will said, voice high and thin.

Hannibal didn't flinch, exactly, but his nostrils flared and his eyes widened. Then, the walls of his mental fortress shut down tight, leaving his eyes blank. Will felt like he had been slapped, and he was the one who had said it, done it. And yet, a dark part of himself was thrilled that he could get this reaction from Hannibal. That he could shock him.

Will's face crumpled. "I'm so sorry," he hissed. "I'm such a fucking mess."

Hannibal didn't say anything. He just watched Will. Horror grew cold inside him -- why didn't Hannibal say anything? His face was utterly impassive. "You're angry," Will said slowly. It wasn't a question.

"I'm hurt," Hannibal said plainly. "But without understanding the why, my anger can find no purchase."

"Right." Will dug his fingernails into his palm.

"Why did you kiss her?" Hannibal asked lightly, tilting his head.

Will shut his eyes tight, then looked at the floor. Then he paced the kitchen, eyes traveling everywhere, and the words spilled out of him. "I always thought she was very kissable," Will said tightly. "But I didn't -- never -- she just dropped by my house while I was hammering a hole in my chimney, because I thought I heard an animal in the chimney, only I didn't, it was just in my head. But it didn't *sound* like it was in my head, I couldn't tell; Hannibal, *I couldn't tell that it wasn't real*. The headaches, sleepwalking... hallucinations. There's something wrong with me. I don't feel stable." His voice was shaking. He ran a hand through his hair, clenching it tightly. "So I kissed her, god, I don't know why. She saw the bruise on my collar and asked me if I was seeing anyone, and I freaked out. I told her it was casual, I didn't want her to find out about us, not that... not that..."

Will stopped his pacing and clutched at his head with both hands. His breathing was ragged. He took a few deep breaths and ran his hands over his face, trying to pull himself back together. "God, I'm so sorry."

Hannibal's voice was calm. "You feel unsteady and unsafe in your own mind. Everything feels like it's falling apart, so you took control of the destruction and did something to sabotage our relationship."

Will looked at him. God, he understood. "Yes," Will said desperately. "That's exactly it."

"Self-destructive behavior is more about regaining control than true destruction of the self," Hannibal said, still as a statue. "You also deflected Alana's attention from who you have been sleeping with, albeit a very messy deflection."

"Fuck." Will took off his glasses and buried his face in his hands. "Relationship? Our relationship?" He laughed bitterly, glaring at Hannibal. "When I thought about Alana finding out it made it clear that what we have can not be a relationship. If she knew about us she would be furious, and Jack wouldn't be able to trust your judgement regarding me, so I would have to find another psych to evaluate me--" He laughed. "--and who I'm never, ever going to tell about my fantasies, and then..."

The words faded away. He was looking at Hannibal, and Hannibal was staring at him dispassionately. Will really had hurt him. He could see it in the way Hannibal let nothing show. Will felt like he had been punched in the gut.

Will took a cautious step forward. "Hannibal, I--"

"Destruction as a means of defining something amorphous," Hannibal mused, standing very still. In fact, he hadn't moved at all since Will had told him. "I applaud you your inventiveness."

Will stopped a few feet away from Hannibal, holding his arms so tightly he could feel his nails through the fabric of his shirt. He ducked his head, and stared at Hannibal's chest. "Told you something was wrong with me," Will muttered with a tight smile.

He waited.

Hannibal sighed. "It is not so great a wound," he eventually said. "It was just a kiss. I am more surprised, by your actions and the strength of my reaction."

Will glanced up. There was still no emotion on Hannibal's face, but his body had relaxed. "I find myself feeling rather possessive."

"You didn't expect to care," Will observed.

Hannibal inclined his head in agreement. "Come. Let me serve you desert; it would be a pity to waste it."

Will wanted to grab Hannibal by the lapels and push him up against the wall, wanted to kiss him, hit him. Instead, Will nodded, hovering around Hannibal as he prepared the dish. "We need to draw clear lines in our relationship," Hannibal continued, plating the creme brûlée and drizzling red fruit compotes over it. "Upon reflection, we should have had this conversation sooner. It is as I said -- limits will keep us both safe. If there are no barriers, what will you thrash against?"

They sat at the small table across from each other. Will stared at the beautiful plate before him, feeling slightly sick. Hannibal poured them wine, and took his time swirling and smelling the drink before bringing it to his lips. Will watched him, his own glass untouched. "I am going to tell you my conditions," Hannibal said, "And then you will tell me what you want."

"I don't want what I want," Will said quietly.

Hannibal met his eyes, sharp and almost predatory. "Yes, I know. But you will tell me regardless."

Will took a sip of his wine. His hands were still shaking.

"You will not kiss Alana Bloom, or anyone else for that matter," Hannibal said, voice cold and clinical. "If you find something lacking in our relationship, you will tell me, and I will endeavor to give it to you. If the conditions are such that you must seek intimacy with others, then we will discuss it."

Will shook his head. "I don't want to, not with anyone else."

Hannibal hummed in consideration. "What was it like to kiss Alana?"

Will winced. "Hannibal, don't--"

"Was she gentle? Nervous? Was she overcome by unbridled desire to kiss you? Were her lips very soft?"

Will bit the inside of his lip. Hannibal's words were like daggers. "Yes," Will said through clenched teeth. "She was soft, she -- she didn't want what she wanted either."

Hannibal took a bite of the desert, savoring. "Do you want me to be soft? Should I kiss you like I am dying to?"

"I didn't kiss her because you're unsatisfactory," Will snapped. "I did it to hurt us."

"And you did."

Will removed his glasses and palmed his face. He put his glasses on the table -- he would probably be rubbing his face in shame all night. "God. I'm so sorry."

Hannibal ignored that. "We are in an arrangement where hurts are exchanged. This is not the type of injury I have any desire to play with. You will not kiss another. Only me."

"Yes," Will agreed. He took a large gulp of wine, barely tasting it.

"Furthermore, you are correct in saying that we should not make our arrangement public. To do so now would be unwise. Still, you require commitment from me. You are scared of commitment, frightened by the possibility of denial and rejection."

"I guess."

"Do you deny it?"

"No. I suppose I don't."

Hannibal leaned back in his chair with his glass of wine. Feeling self-conscious, Will took a bite of his dessert. It tasted really good, sweet and warm and just a bit tart. His stomach clenched. He hadn't eaten since a late lunch but he wasn't sure that he could keep down another bite. What sort of commitment would Hannibal give him? Will couldn't think of one that didn't terrify him.

"I will likewise not take anyone else to bed," Hannibal continued. "Nor engage in our other activities with another. I have no desire to do so, but even if I did, I wouldn't."

"Ok."

"We will not be a public couple, but I will take you to the opera, and on occasion to other establishments. We will be discrete. To the outsider it will seem like two friends enjoying each other's company; but we will know better." Hannibal regarded him steadily. Will focused on the food. When Hannibal spoke again, there was a hint of longing to his voice. "I confess that I have other desires concerning you. I wish to dress you properly, and alter your diet, and dictate your daily movements. I want control over your life to a degree that may be unhealthy for both of us. To have you subservient to me, to take care of you in all aspects. Would you like that Will? To place your decisions in my hands?"

Will shuddered. "I... I don't know."

"As satisfying as that arrangement would be in the short run, I do not think it completely suits us." Hannibal's voice pitched low. "You don't want to give up your autonomy. You want to fight and be overcome, struggle and be subdued, broken -- if such a thing is possible."

Hannibal's eyes were dark and teeming with desire, his smile faint and wicked. Will's mouth went dry. "Yes, that's right."

"And of course I do not wish to see you passive and completely subservient. I want to watch you struggle. Tell me, Will: will you make me work very hard to bring you to heel?"

Will flushed. He could feel Hannibal's desire stir a similar need in him, a desire sharp and coiled, poised to lash out. He wanted to struggle against Hannibal, to bite and tear into him, to calmly discuss the boundaries of their relationship and then throw himself against them until he shattered or they did. Will closed his eyes for a moment, gathering all the anxious, thrashing fibers of himself and stroking them, tenderly, hush. A familiar cold calm settled over him.

Will opened his eyes. "Yes, I'm going to make it difficult for you. I can't help it."

"I suppose you can't," Hannibal purred. "Then for my last condition: complete honesty. You can disobey my orders and reap the consequences, but if you are not honest about your transgressions then I cannot calibrate accordingly."

Will tilted his head, considering. It was no longer difficult to look at Hannibal. Of course a mere kiss wasn't going to run their 'arrangement'. If Hannibal didn't care about Will cutting himself open in the bathroom then a single kiss was hardly earth-shattering. Will reflected on his actions in a new light: he hadn't felt in control of himself, and he had wanted to control the process of destruction. He hadn't wanted to ruin their relationship, but rather test the boundaries and reap the consequences. Destruction and construction; Hannibal drawing lines for Will to bend and cut himself upon. "Alright," Will said. "I accept your conditions."

Hannibal smiled, his eyes narrowing. "What are yours?"

Will spent a few minutes thinking, and they both ate. Will wiped a trail of red sauce from his lips, sucking the sweetness on his thumb. "I want to go to Mexico," he said at last. "I want you to take me traveling and for us to live like a couple abroad. I want this to be official, at some point; I think I do. But I don't know how to get to that point. I can't imagine that future yet. Until then, I want you to think of me as yours, and I'll think of you as mine."

"Of course," Hannibal replied as if it was inevitable.

Will stared at his lips, the almost inhuman planes of his face, cheek bones Will could cut himself on. Could Hannibal really be his, just like that? No, Will had walls to climb and barriers to pass before Hannibal let him in. "You're ridiculously gorgeous," Will found himself saying. "You know that, don't you? Of course you know." He wet his lips. Hannibal just smiled at him benevolently. "I want you to try and break me," Will said. "I want... god, I want so much from you. But mostly I want you to see me, and I want to see you."

"That won't be an easy task," Hannibal said.

"I know," Will replied with a grin. "But if anyone can, I can."

"That is truer than you know."

Will reached across the table and grabbed Hannibal's hand. He ran his thumb across his knuckles. "Those are my conditions."

"You won't ask for my honesty?"

"I don't need it for the same reason you do," Will said. "You want to be honest with me, as honest as you can. That's enough."

Hannibal brought Will's hand up for a kiss. "Very well."

"Oh, one more thing." Will's eyes gleamed mischievously. "I think you should punish me for my earlier transgression."

Hannibal raised an eyebrow. "It's not true punishment if you enjoy it."

Will chuckled. "I know. But I mean it. I won't apologize again even though I want to. I feel really fucking stupid."

"I will contemplate a suitable punishment," Hannibal replied. He stood up and began to take care of the dishes, and Will stood to help him clean up from dinner. Hannibal washed the dishes and Will dried.

"Can I kiss you?" Will asked. They had barely touched at all and it was starting to drive Will mad.

"Only after you brush your teeth."

Will blanched. "Seriously?"

"I am quite serious," Hannibal said, though there was amusement in his voice. "I have a very sensitive nose and palette and do not wish to taste anyone else on you. In fact, I think it's best that you shower as well so that I can rid you of Alana's charming perfume."

Will snorted. "Fine, whatever you say, *master*."

Hannibal took the dish towel from Will's hands and flicked him with it.

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They showered together again, and Will thought that maybe this was his punishment, to be so close to a warm, wet, and naked Hannibal without being able to touch him properly. Will went immediately to smooth his hands across Hannibal's shoulders under the spay of the shower, but Hannibal removed his hands. Will huffed in frustration. His hands lingered as he washed Hannibal, but his hands would be removed when Hannibal decided the touch was unnecessary. It was incredibly frustrating and more than a bit of a turn on.

"You're a tease," Will said as they dried off. Will was cursory with his towel and slung it around his waist before going to the sink, impatient to brush his teeth. He took the spare toothbrush from the medicine cabinet. Suddenly, Hannibal was behind him, and Will jolted in surprise. "Fuck, you're a sneaky bastard," Will exclaimed as Hannibal wrapped his hands around Will's waist.

"Do I need to wash your mouth out with soap?" Hannibal teased.

"Probably -- oh god, please don't," Will said. "I'll throw up."

"Probably," Hannibal conceded. He took the toothbrush from Will's hand, kissing him briefly on the back of the neck. Hannibal reached for the toothpaste.

"Are you going to brush my teeth?" Will asked, mildly horrified. Hannibal rested his chin on Will's shoulder, squeezing toothpaste onto the brush. Of course, Hannibal had a fancy medical grade toothpaste, the type that came in two separate tubes, one labeled 'whitening accelerator'. "You are," Will breathed, a laugh threatening to escape. "What, you don't think I'm going to do a good enough job?" He looked at the two of them in the mirror, and there was an amused smile on Hannibal's face.

Hannibal stood up straight and turned Will around so his back was against the counter. "Open your mouth," Hannibal instructed.

Will looked at him incredulously for a moment. "I'm not an invalid," he said.

Hannibal gave one of his level, patient stares. "Humor me."

Will rolled his eyes, and opened his mouth. Hannibal took him gently by the jaw, getting Will's mouth at the proper angle, and inserted the toothbrush. He began to brush his lower anterior morals, decisive swirling motions. It was a very strange combination of vulnerability and clinical detachment. Will didn't even know if his father had ever brushed his teeth, though it seemed like he must have -- Will certainly didn't remember. Hannibal's face was close, and his attention was on Will's mouth, so Will availed himself the opportunity to inspect his face, chronicling every crease. In Will's mind, Hannibal's skin was flawless, but in actuality there were imperfections and signs of age.

It felt weird to hold his mouth open, almost like he was going to gag. Hannibal kept adjusting him slightly, commanding him to open wider in a hushed voice. It did feel intimate; Hannibal was inside his mouth. He had been before, in multiple ways: his food, his tongue, his fingers, his... Will flushed and the back of his tongue rolled against the build up of spit and foam. Oh god, what if he started to drool? Surely Hannibal wouldn't subject him to that.

"Spit," Hannibal commanded, and Will shuddered. He turned around and spat out the excess toothpaste. The towel was slipping so he adjusted it, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand before turning back to Hannibal.

"This is mildly embarrassing," Will muttered. Hannibal was holding the toothbrush aloft, waiting, so Will opened his mouth again.

"It is strange," Hannibal conceded, moving to the upper rows of teeth. Will adjusted his tongue and mouth to give Hannibal better access. It was occasionally ticklish, and he flinched; Hannibal pulled back momentarily, and tightened his grip on Will's jaw. "I have cleaned most other parts of your body," Hannibal said, "Yet this is different. It is an inefficient way to clean your teeth, and an atypical intimacy, and therefore I must have an ulterior motive for doing so. A kink in the truest sense. Or, it is exceptional because I am inside you in an unexpected way. Wounds, orifices, the very act of eating penetrates the boundaries of the body and reminds us that we are mortal."

Will grunted.

Hannibal smiled, pulling Will's lip back with his thumb. Will put his teeth together and Hannibal cleaned the outside. "Yes, an added advantage is that you can't speak."

Will glared at him. His thumb was brushing his lip softly. Every sensation was strangely heightened from the awareness that Hannibal could slip and bruise his gum; Will couldn't really be harmed, this was no knife to his skin, but it was similar.

Hannibal slipped his thumb into Will's mouth and blade him open wide. He then brushed the interior of Will's teeth, bristles occasionally scraping his palette, and that was so ticklish that Will gagged back a laugh and his lips twitched into a smile. Hannibal grabbed the inside of Will's mouth with three fingers, forcing his jaw wide, and continued his ministrations. Will choked, and swallowed some toothpaste, which was gross, definitely gross -- why was this turning him on? He gripped the edge of the counter, cheeks growing warm.

"Maybe I simply enjoy putting things in your mouth," Hannibal purred. How could he make the word 'things' sound incredibly filthy? Hannibal brushed Will's tongue, and he stuck it out far, red in the cheeks. "Wine, which you refuse to drink properly. Delicacies I have cooked for you, which you enjoy rapturously, while I taste the exact same, like we share a mouth. Flesh, cooked tenderly. And myself, it hardly needs to be said, that I want you to taste me nearly as much as I want to taste you. Do you remember telling me about your fantasy where I stick my arm down your throat?"

Will moaned, and Hannibal pressed the toothbrush against the back of his tongue. Will gagged, spit and toothpaste leaking out the sides of his mouth. He made to spin around but Hannibal held on to his cheek, brush prodding the back of his throat. Before he knew what he was doing, Will clamped his teeth shut; but Hannibal's fingers were safely on the anterior of his teeth, and those that held the toothbrush mere centimeters away from his incisors. At least he had a hold on the toothbrush so Hannibal couldn't keep fucking choking him.

Hannibal grinned, his own teeth gleaming. Will's eyes were teary from choking. For a moment he thought about Hannibal forcing the toothbrush down the back of his throat, bruising his trachea. The bristles of the brush were still too close to his epiglottis. He froze, feeling trapped. Both his hands were free, but all Hannibal would need to do was shove his palm forward. Not that he would. He wouldn't. Yet Will was terrified, and his brain was firing off rapidly -- Will could close the back of his throat and strike Hannibal in the solar plexus. They were so close that he wouldn't have much leverage; still, Hannibal wouldn't expect it. They both stood very still.

Will clamped down on the back of his throat.

Hannibal moved insanely fast. Suddenly his hands were gone from Will's mouth. He spun Will around and took him into a choke hold before the tooth brush had clattered to the ground. Will grabbed his forearm, scratching. "Sadist," Will hissed.

Hannibal pinned one of Will's arms behind his back with his free hand and held it between their bodies, bending Will over the counter enough that it dug into his hip bones. "Masochist," Hannibal hissed in return, tearing the towel away and running his hand down Will's thigh.

Will spat into the sink.

"Intimacy of this sort is all the more thrilling when there is danger behind it," Hannibal whispered, adjusting them both so he could take Will's half-erection in hand, which sprang to life. He squeezed on Will's throat, and he let out a pant, gasping for air through his open mouth. "Look at yourself," Hannibal ordered, and Will did, and -- he looked ruined, his face flushed, eyes blown wide, a wet

dribble on his chin. And Hannibal -- Hannibal looked monstrous, entwined around Will, his eyes dark, too dark, almost red. Will could feel him hard through the towel.

"Fuck me," Will snarled. "Get inside me, rip me open."

Hannibal squeezed tighter and Will saw stars, the edges of his vision going black. Fuck, he was so hard. Hannibal eased out of the choke grip and took Will's throat in his hand. He pumped Will steadily, and Will pushed back against him. "No," Hannibal said, and bit Will's shoulder.

Will screamed, and slammed a fist on the counter. Oh god, that definitely broke skin. Hannibal was lapping at it.

No. The refusal echoed through Will. He needed this, but Hannibal wouldn't give it to him, because Hannibal didn't need it, didn't need Will in the way Will needed him. Disposable. *Weak*. Will's breath hitched. He was being scratched at from the inside, the monsters clawing for freedom, scratching his bones -- the sound it made, like horse hair across treated vocal chords.

Will's mind focused to a deadly edge. *No, don't think that, don't consider* -- but the thought was inevitable. In his minds eye he saw a dark room with a massive tangle of red threads, so vivid a color that they glowed. It was an artless mess, but Will could see the shape it would make when the weights came down, the inevitable thought too terrible to be denied. Fear surged through him, as well as the same deadly calm from when he had decided to hurt himself while Hannibal was away. *No*. Hannibal drew lines and Will threw himself against them.

The weights came down and the threads tightened, springing into a taut web, blood flying through the air from the force of the vibration. *What if I don't accept 'no'?*

"*Obsidian*," Will gasped.

Hannibal let go of him immediately, and Will sagged against the countertop. He felt physically sick. Slowly, he sunk down the counter until he was curled up against it, hiding his face behind a hand. Oh god, he had thought it, he had almost said it. He had *wanted* to say it. There was no way he could force Hannibal to fuck him, not like this. *Not like this?* Will laughed hysterically, clutching his hair. No, Hannibal would be able to overpower him in almost every situation.

"Will." Hannibal's voice was gentle. He knelt before Will.

Almost every situation. Hannibal with his hands tied behind his back, neck bolted to the concrete cell wall, Will sinking onto him --

Will grabbed his head, eyes wide and boring into the tiled floor. Tears slipped from his eyes.

"Will, what did you see?"

Will pulled at his hair until his scalp screamed. "I want to smash my head," he said, his voice oddly calm.

"You may not." Hannibal bent, trying to meet his eyes, but Will wouldn't let him. He smiled -- why was he smiling? -- and his jaw ached from it. "May I touch you?"

Will shook his head 'no'.

Hannibal folded the towel on the floor and placed it between Will's head and the cabinet, careful not to touch him. Will leaned against it, eyes screwed shut. At least now if he smashed his head back it wouldn't do as much damage. He twisted the fantasy playing in his head into a safer arrangement: Hannibal was locked in a cell, neck bolted to a wall. He was injured, signs of a struggle, a busted lip and bruise on his brow. The cell door opened, and someone dragged Will in, naked and with a leash around his neck. The third figure was all shadows and blurred features, flickering with coils and the barbed ends of antlers. He took Will to the ground. Will would struggle, and the shadow man would smash his head against the stone floor, and Hannibal would trash against his restraints until he realized that it was absolutely futile, and the shadow man would line up behind Will and --

"Will. Look at me."

Hannibal would say it, just like that, calm in the face of desperation. And Will would look, and their eyes would be one as he was torn to pieces.

Will looked up, horror written on his features. Hannibal was visibly concerned, but his voice was steady. "Will, talk to me. Are you hallucinating?"

Will shook his head. "No, I'm fantasizing. I had a terrible thought." His voice caught in his throat. "Oh god, I -- *Hannibal.*"

"It was merely a thought," Hannibal said, voice gentle. His body language reminded Will of how he might approach a frightened dog. "You have done nothing wrong."

"Yet," Will hissed with a broken laugh.

"Breathe, Will," Hannibal said, his own breath slow and loud so that Will could match it. He took a few deep breaths, holding them for a count of three before exhaling. "Tell me what you thought."

"I can't," Will said, shaking his head furiously. "No, no, I can't."

"How will you free yourself if you keep your demons locked away? You are giving this thought power over yourself, let it go. There is nothing you could say that would drive me away." Hannibal sounded so sure and sincere, and Will wanted to believe him. Will had told Hannibal worse, hadn't he? But no, none of it had been about hurting Hannibal. He felt nauseous.

Will closed his eyes, framing his forehead with both hands. There was no way he could look at Hannibal and say this. His lip trembled. "You said 'no'," Will said slowly, "And I thought 'what if I don't accept that?'"

Suddenly, Will's mind was clear. The silence in the bathroom was nearly complete, no deadly chords, just the subtle hum of the heated floor, and Hannibal's steady breathing. Will was holding his breath. "It's alright, Will," Hannibal said.

Will shook his head, hard.

Hannibal held out his hand. Will looked at it, his own hands relaxing their vice-like grip around his skull. "It is," Hannibal confirmed. Will reached out and squeezed his hand tightly.

"Convince me?" Will asked with a pained smile.

Hannibal smoothed his thumb over Will's knuckles. "It's a terrible thing to think," Hannibal said smoothly, "and would be a terrible thing to say. Equally terrible are your thoughts about being tortured. Thoughts preclude actions but are not equivalent, nor inevitable. If they were, then there would be far more killers in this world."

Will nodded.

Hannibal stroked the inside of his wrist. "The magnitude of your repulsion towards the thought is evidence enough that you would not truly force yourself on me."

"Or evidence of the strength of the impulse," Will countered bitterly.

Hannibal squeezed his hand. His eyes were soft. "You have sexual fantasies where you are the victim of assault, and you wish to explore those fantasies with me. Tell me Will -- if we were to play out those scenes, would you be repulsed with me, horrified?"

"No, no." Will pinched the bridge of his nose. "That's not the same."

"Isn't it?"

"That would be you fulfilling my fantasy," Will said, hearing how flimsy his argument was even as he said it.

"But I would enjoy it, Will."

Will looked at Hannibal, really looked -- how he was kneeling with his hand in Will's, naked save for the towel around his waist, his hair pushed back but falling messily in front of his eyes. Benevolent was the word that came to mind, relaxed but undeniably powerful. Hannibal was undeterred by Will's dark desires, fascinated and accepting, and Will had the sudden image of Hannibal shaping wet clay on a throwing wheel by a mere stroke of his hand. There was desire there too, undeniably. "I want to have you struggle against me," Hannibal said, unembarrassed, almost serene. "Fight like the fierce beast you are, and then be overcome. I want to take you as mine."

Will swallowed. He didn't even notice that he was relaxing, leaning forward to be closer, wet-mouthed and ragged at the edges. "You would be frightened," Hannibal continued. "And you would be safe. And I would know, even as you begged me to stop, that I was giving you what you needed." Hannibal raised Will's hand and kissed his knuckles, eyes fluttering shut for a moment. "That desire does not make me a rapist."

Just as tying myself up doesn't make myself the Marionette Murderer? Will thought. Something about the unsaid analogy didn't sit right with Will. "I know," he said, even though he felt like a piece was missing, and tried to smile. He squeezed Hannibal's hand, pulling it slightly. He wanted to be held and didn't know how to get the words out, but that small gesture was enough, and Hannibal pulled Will into his arms. Will threw his arms around Hannibal's neck, breathing him in. He wasn't alright, but maybe it was enough that Hannibal held him and breathed him in as well.

Hannibal skimmed his lips over Will's jaw, running broad strokes over his back. Will turned his face towards Hannibal, resting cheek to cheek. "We don't have to have sex," he said quietly.

"We will eventually," Hannibal said.

"I don't want the first time to be... like that." Will pressed his face against Hannibal's, pricking him softly with his stubble.

Hannibal sighed, contentedly. "No, of course not."

Abigail's voice came back to Will. *You know a lot about trauma, were you...* The iron clad control Hannibal exerted over himself, his mental fortress of ancient stone dug deep into the earth. The kind of loss of control Hannibal must have suffered. Will let out a sob, and pressed his forehead to Hannibal's, wanting to kiss him desperately, like he was dying for it. Never, never unless Hannibal wanted to.

Hannibal kissed him, slow and soft, utterly unlike Alana. It was impossible to compare the two. Will fell into him, opening his mouth and feeling, very carefully, as if he were drawing a map, the shape of Hannibal's lips, the place where his lips met his gums, and then his teeth. Hannibal breathed into him, molding his mouth against Will's. He caught his tongue with teeth and then sucked on it, and Will let out a small, shuddering moan. He sucked at Hannibal, biting his lip, growing desperate in turn, and then gentle again, placing gentle kisses around his mouth, his chin, his jaw.

Hannibal broke away, brushing Will's bottom lip with his thumb. "You've been pushed far enough tonight," he muttered. "Let me take care of you."

Will sighed loudly, relieved. Hannibal helped him to bed and had Will lie on his stomach. Will crossed his wrists over his head and buried his face into the soft pillow, worn out and still slightly on edge. He heard Hannibal open the bedside drawer and open a bottle, rub something through his hands, and then the fragrance of lavender and coconut filled the room. Hannibal's hands were warm and slick on his back, breathing sensation into Will's body that wasn't the sharp edge of wires. Will moaned into his pillow, the warmth of care second only to the deft movements of Hannibal's hands. Will relaxed into the massage as Hannibal worked the knots out of him, dispelling stress from his neck down his spine, and then down his arms and out his fingertips.

His whole body was warm and pliant. Instead of breaking to release the tension, Hannibal was coaxing his body to relax. It felt so good. Hannibal touched the scar on his shoulder blade, tenderly massaging the oil into the old scar tissue.

Will turned his head so his mouth was no longer obscured in the pillow. "I was stabbed," he said, as Hannibal traced the scar. "Before I quit the N'Awlins police force."

Hannibal smiled at Will's slip into a southern accent. He imagined that Will must pick up accents quickly, and wondered how long it would take the remarkable man to learn a language if he was immersed in it. "Why did you quit?" Hannibal asked.

"Mostly getting stabbed," Will muttered. "It's hard to be around the living. I prefer corpses and analyzing the crime scenes after the fact."

"You crossed paths with victims of crimes, and your empathy mired you in their pain," Hannibal observed. His hands were on Will's hips now, rubbing firm circles. Will curled his spine into the touch.

"Yeah. I was getting overwhelmed. Getting stabbed seemed like a good enough last straw."

Hannibal sat lower on Will's legs and began to massage his thighs. Will put his face back into the pillow, disguising his more-frequent moans. Hannibal arched his brows in amusement, and set out to tease those sounds from Will. He adjusted his legs wider apart and stroked both flanks with his oiled palms, then dragged his thumbs up the insides, all the way to the cleft of his ass. Will tried to quiet his moans, and bent a leg so he could prod Hannibal in the back. "Don't tense up," Hannibal said, slowly stroking his thighs. "Let me hear you."

Will turned his head, brows furrowed. "You're teasing me," he accused.

"You've caught me red-handed, Officer Graham," Hannibal said.

Will barked out a laugh, and made a feeble attempt to swat Hannibal. He settled back down with a smile. "Hmmm, it feels good."

Hannibal massaged his ass, kneading the tight muscles on the sides that met his lower back. Then, languidly, he stroked and squeezed towards the interior, running his thumb down the stripe between Will's cheeks. Will shuddered and moaned in response, and Hannibal returned to gentle caressing, drawing circles outward and down to his thighs before coming back inevitably. Will shifted his legs apart wider, and Hannibal sat between them.

"Are you gay?" Will asked from beneath a head of wet curls. Hannibal was surprised, expecting expletives or more banter, but Will's curiosity was not unwelcome.

"No," Hannibal replied easily, continuing to stroke. "I have been with men and women. Gender is of little importance to me; people are people, after all."

"How liberal of you."

"And yourself?" Hannibal asked, stroking the tops of his thighs.

"I never thought I'd be in a relationship with a man. I've only dated women." Will moaned as Hannibal drew his thumb over his hole, up to his tailbone. "Slept with more men, though. It was easier, always felt more simple."

Hannibal dug his thumbs in on either side of Will's spine and slipped up it, feeling every ridge. Will sighed, and there was a low rumble in the back of his throat when Hannibal took his thumbs back down his spine, tracing the highest peaks of his ass, and squeezing the top of his thighs.

"Ever been in love?" Will asked, a hint of mockery in his voice. These were the questions one was supposed to ask, after all, appropriate and yet inappropriate.

Hannibal paused, a tension in his hands, but he still stroked Will's skin softly. "I've always been a bachelor," Hannibal said, and could have avoided the question with that, but he went on. "There have been precious few people in my life whom I couldn't bare to part with."

"But there have been a few."

"If love is the fiercest connection between two entities, more indomitable than passion, a deeper bond than blood, then yes, I have been in love."

Will mulled over his words, giving into Hannibal's sensual touches. He could have laid like that forever, the words coursing through him, touched by loss -- *I couldn't bare to part with.* And

Hannibal let him bask in the possibility of love, his touches just on the other side of sexual, before giving the question back to him.

"Have you been in love, Will?" Hannibal asked.

"Mmm." Will raised his shoulders in a shrug. "Not really -- I don't know. I thought I was, once, back when I started on the force. But looking back, I think I just wanted to be loved. Can't tell if the feelings were mine or just reflections."

"To feel another's emotions as your own," Hannibal said, contemplative.

"Empathy isn't love," Will said, panting softly. "If it is, it's a love without agency."

Hannibal slipped his thumb over Will's entrance, putting pressure above, then below. Will's breath hitched. He pushed his hips down against Hannibal's thumb. "Yes, a single mirror would not suffice," Hannibal said, pouring more massage oil into his hands. "A mirror on its own cannot become, only intimate. Let it be alone, in the dark, just another plane of glass." Hannibal pressed his thumb slowly into Will, who was so relaxed that he opened easily with a long sigh. "Or give it a twin so that the mirror may behold itself."

"You're... not a mirror," Will gasped, eyes fluttering shut. "Not mine."

"No?" Hannibal purred, sinking deeper and then retracting to stretch the tight ring of muscle. He hunched forward and kissed the scar on Will's shoulder. "Then I will need to break you in two and show you yourself."

"God," Will moaned.

Hannibal thrust into him slow and steady, kissing and softly teething the knobs of his spine. Will let himself be loud, knowing Hannibal wanted to hear him, all the ways the smooth glide of his fingers translated to gasps and wretched moans. Will had never been with a man like this before, manual stimulation as its own end and not just to prep for a fuck. It was strange, too, to lay like a pillow princess and let Hannibal touch him without any reciprocation; no way for Will to dismiss his own pleasure in pursuit of his partner's. Now he couldn't hide his reactions from Hannibal's scrutiny, and didn't want to either. The latent shame of being on display was sweetened by the knowledge that Hannibal was greedy for the sight of him. The way his finger slid in and out, the oil-slick sheen of his skin, the curl of his shoulders and unfurling of his spine. Hannibal replaced his thumb with two fingers, slowly stretching him.

"I want to touch you," Will gasped out as Hannibal twisted his fingers deep. "Can I -- can --"

Hannibal shifted on the bed, lying next to Will. The other curled into him, throwing his leg high over his hip so Hannibal could reach him. Will grasped him firmly in hand, his whole body shaking. "God, you feel so good." Will thumbed the head of his cock, smoothing the drips of precum around, mouth open in a perpetual 'o' of pleasure. Hannibal murmured to him in his mother tongue, thrusting deep, so deep, to pet his prostate. Will stroked him like how he liked it, his rhythm interrupted whenever Hannibal touched him just so.

They lay entwined for a while, stroking each other until they were each sweating and shuddering. Hannibal came nearly silently, clamping down on Will's shoulder with his teeth and a short guttural sound. Will stroked him through it and followed shortly after, keening and twisting in the sheets.

Hannibal kissed him softly. Will lay half asleep while Hannibal prepared for bed and turned off the lights downstairs, rousing briefly to curl up against the man before drifting asleep.

Will wanted to say that he slept well at Hannibal's, but it was only half true. He would always be exhausted enough to actually fall asleep, unlike his nightly vigils at Wolf Trap, but his sleep was still troubled by night terrors. Hannibal slept through it all, and didn't comment on how Will woke sweaty, kicked free of the duvet.

In the morning Will showered the sweat of nightmares away. All he had were his sweaty and riverstone dust coated clothes from last night, so he threw on a robe, consigned to borrow clothes from Hannibal. He found the man in the kitchen, poaching eggs.

"Good morning, Will," Hannibal said with a small smile.

Will walked behind him and put his hands around his waist, kissing the back of his neck. "What's for breakfast?" he asked.

"Poached eggs with cave-aged gruyere, arugula and prosciutto."

"Smells good. I need to borrow some clothes."

"Mmm. The first left dresser in my wardrobe, the bottom two drawers."

"You won't insist on dressing me?" Will teased.

Hannibal smiled enigmatically.

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"Motherfucker," Will cursed.

The two drawers of the appointed dresser were obviously meant exclusively for Will. They were filled with cotton undershirts, flannel shirts, jeans, slacks, and even underwear and socks. All of it was similar to what Will usually wore, but obviously more expensive, and in slightly different colors. Will sighed, and began to dress himself. The dark jeans he selected were much more fitted than what Will usually wore, and he didn't always bother with a t-shirt under the flannel, though Hannibal would probably admonish him if he didn't. As he adjusted his hair in front of the full length mirror, Will had to admit that he looked pretty good. Did Hannibal truly like him in flannel, or was this a concession? Hannibal probably knew that Will would refuse a huge change in wardrobe, which would be conspicuous anyway. Will buttoned the collar to conceal the bite mark at the base of his neck, and returned downstairs.

Breakfast was ready, and Hannibal gave Will an admiring look that made him feel embarrassingly pleased with himself. Blushing, Will muttered, "I'd say you've outdone yourself, but I know you haven't."

"Please don't think much of it," Hannibal said as they took the plates and coffee to the dining room. "I thought it would be convenient, and I was correct."

"Hannibal, it's a lot."

They sat down and began to eat. "It was no trouble at all," Hannibal said, "and if it would make you feel better, think of it as something I did for myself."

"Thank you," Will said, and gave Hannibal a pointed look. "Don't get carried away."

"I will endevour not to spoil you too terribly."

"Liar."

Hannibal chuckled.

By the time Will was ready to head out, Hannibal had grown solemn and contemplative. There was a crease between his brows and his mind was elsewhere. "What it is?" Will asked as he donned his coat.

Hannibal looked at him with surprised, his mouth parted -- then he smiled. "I'm not used to being read like an open book," Hannibal confessed. "I was thinking about your Maestro."

"What about him?"

Hannibal paused. "I hesitate to tell you this as it borders on violation of doctor-patient confidentiality. I've never been in this position before." He took a slow breath. "A patient told me yesterday that he suspects his friend might be involved with the murder at the symphony."

That wasn't what Will expected at all. Will frowned, mind snapping to his current case. "What did he say about his friend?"

"He owns a music store in Baltimore specializing in string instruments," Hannibal said, his eyes catching Will's in an intense stare. "Perhaps you should interview him."

Will nodded. When Hannibal kissed him goodbye, he cradled Will's skull in both hands, a deep, possessive kiss that might have left Will reeling if his mind wasn't replaying the Maestro's performance, the thundering wail of bleached and oiled vocal chords.

Chapter End Notes

well that was a bit of a roller coaster for Will. thanks for reading!

Kintsugi

Chapter Summary

> *What had Will looked like when he was struggling for his life? Had he been calm and calculating, or shaken and unsteady? The skin of his neck breaking under Tobias's wire, his body cold, bloodied, a last shuddering gasp for life. By Tobias's hands. If Hannibal could kill the man again, he would.*
> °°°°°°°°°°

Will and Hannibal are grateful to be alive.

Chapter Notes

hi tobias

bye tobias

cw: mention of self-harm. again, blurring the lines between self-harm + blood play, Hannibal giving Will permission to hurt himself.

tumblr

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal's fingers hovered over the harpsichord. The music was in his head, echoing with lingering adrenaline and the sharp, tangy satisfaction of a kill. He struck the note, letting the sound of the cable flow through him, sweet and bright. The next notes flowed out of him, a composition spilling forth, raw and unfettered -- his serenade. His serenade for Will.

Will. Hannibal limped over to his desk chair and rested in it, closing his eyes. He brought up the image of Tobias entering his office, bullet hole blown clear through his ear, an omen of Will's failure. He had sent Will after a known killer. Tobias had known that the police would come after him and was prepared to kill; meanwhile Will did not know what he would walk into. Will was clever and armed, though not a spectacular shot. Hannibal mulled over the pieces in his head. Tobias had admitted to killing two men, likely a police officer and Will. Hannibal longed for Will's ability to instantly read evidence, thinking about the gun shot to Tobias's ear and wondering what angle the shooter had been at to come so close to a kill and yet miss spectacularly. It had been a nearly point blank shot, and one with poetic irony: injuring his ear, though not in a way that would have damaged his ability to hear. Hannibal saw it then: Tobias strangling the shooter with his wire, the gun and hands just barely keeping the shooter alive. It could have been Will. Or it might not have been.

Will could be dead. It was an absurd thought -- how could such a fascinating mind be snuffed out, a ragged and desperately alive body be made into a corpse, cold and empty? No more twitching expressions, flushing skin; no more clenched hands struggling to contain the darkness of his mind; no more fire in his brain. Of course, Hannibal knew it was entirely possible that Will was dead. He had sent him after Tobias knowing the possible outcomes. What would a test be without consequences? A part of Hannibal didn't want to accept that someone as imperfect as Tobias could do away with Will, but they were each of them mortal. Death was mere steps away.

What had Will looked like when he was struggling for his life? Had he been calm and calculating, or shaken and unsteady? The skin of his neck breaking under Tobias's wire, his body cold, bloodied, a last shuddering gasp for life. By Tobias's hands. If Hannibal could kill the man again, he would. Hannibal was no stranger to loss. He told himself that if Will had died, then he hadn't truly been worthy. A singular mind, utterly unique, the only chance Hannibal had to be truly seen by another individual. But if Will could not survive Tobias, he would not be able to survive Hannibal. He told himself the ache in his chest would fade.

Police and EMTs arrived. Hannibal gave his statement and tolerated the EMT's inspection of his wounds, but quickly brushed them off. He wouldn't need a hospital, as he could take care of the stab wound in his leg. Hannibal watched the steady stream of people in and out of the door, waiting.

Jack came through, looking around the office, and time seemed to slow down to a razor's edge: on one side, Will-alive; on the other, Will-dead. Hannibal felt the two possible futures acutely.

Then Will walked through the door, and Hannibal felt the razor cut away his doubts. The relief was immense, surprisingly so. Hannibal's eyes were wet. Will was alive, of course he was, perfect and deadly and worthy of him. Will glanced around the room and his eyes found Hannibal's, his own relief plain. Will walked over to the desk, eyes only leaving Hannibal's to glance him over for injuries. He stood close, leaning against the desk, his arms folded against his chest and a weary smile on his face.

"I was worried you were dead," Hannibal said, voice nearly trembling with emotion. So surprising, the feelings Will aroused in him.

Will wanted to touch him, it was obvious in the way he clenched his arms and how his eyes flickered between Hannibal's, greedy for everything they had to say. Will showed Hannibal his arm, bloody from the cut of the wire. "You had reason to worry," he said.

Jack walked over. Hannibal knew there were questions to be answered, but he wanted everyone out of his office. This was a moment for himself and Will, and it was infuriating to have to share it with so many inconsequential people. "Tobias Budge kills two Baltimore Police officers," Jack said, "Nearly kills an FBI Special Agent, and after all that his first stop is you office."

"He came to kill my patient," Hannibal said truthfully.

Will turned slightly to Jack. "Hannibal's patient told him he suspected a friend was involved with the murder at the symphony. Hannibal told me and I investigated. I got him involved." A measure of guilt in his voice. Will looked back at Hannibal. "Your patient. Is that who Tobias Budge was serenading?"

"I don't know," Hannibal said, lying easily. "Franklyn knew more than he was telling me. He told Mr. Budge that he didn't have to kill anymore. Then he broke Franklyn's neck. Then he attacked

me."

Will watched Hannibal. There was no need for him to perform feelings of fear and victimhood that were foreign to him, the truth was sufficient: Hannibal had fought for his life and won. Will had seen Hannibal in a crisis thrice now, and knew that he was level-headed, trained for years to handle stress as an emergency room surgeon, and of course, unknown to Will, from his many kills.

"And you killed him," Jack said.

Reluctantly, Hannibal looked away from Will and to Jack. Jack's suspicions wouldn't be so easily swayed, but Hannibal wasn't concerned. He glanced over at Frederick with feigned sadness, just in case. "Yes," Hannibal said.

"Could your patient have been involved with any of what Budge was doing?" Will asked.

"I thought this was a simple matter of poor choice in friends," Hannibal said.

Jack shook his head. "This doesn't feel simple." He walked off to observe the crime scene.

Will looked at Hannibal and frowned at the blotch of blood on his forehead. He took up a piece of gauze left by the EMTs and blotted the wound carefully. "I feel like I've dragged you into my world."

Hannibal smiled, eyes soft. Will's fingers trailed down his cheek as he removed his hand, just slightly. "I got here on my own," Hannibal said. "But I appreciate the company."

"Let's get out of here," Will said quietly. "Don't mind Jack, he doesn't leave any stone unturned."

"And he should be thorough," Hannibal replied.

"I can drive you home."

Hannibal smiled, looking tired. "That would be appreciated."

Will took Hannibal's arm, ostensibly to help him walk with the wound in his leg, but more urgently because he needed to touch the other man. Hannibal leaned into him gratefully as they descended the stairs. If anyone saw the intimacy in the two injured men's touch, they didn't spare a second look. Will wanted to kiss him, but even outside people were milling about, so Will opted instead to squeeze Hannibal's arm.

"I'm glad you're alright," Will said under his breath as they walked to Hannibal's car.

"We have both been victorious tonight," Hannibal said.

Will snorted. "That's one way of looking at it."

They arrived at the black Bentley and Hannibal fished the keys out of his coat pocket. Will turned towards him, nosing his ear. "Not here," Hannibal said. "Someone might see."

"I don't fucking care," Will muttered, rubbing his forehead against Hannibal's temple. Despite his protesting, Hannibal didn't move away. "I'm so glad you're okay."

"I take it you missed Freddie Lounds' figure in the crowd," Hannibal said.

Will moved back at that, and glanced over his shoulder. He didn't see her. "Fuck. Fine." Will helped Hannibal into the passenger seat, and went around the other side. He shut the door, and turned to Hannibal. He looked fragile, older, still put together with only a few strands out of place (he must have smoothed out his hair before people arrived in his office). But some of the fortress walls were down, and the way he looked at Will was filled with gratitude.

"I am also exceptionally glad that you are alright," Hannibal said. "Your injury isn't treated, are you hurt elsewhere?"

Will shook his head. His hand was on the steering wheel but he hadn't started the car yet; he just needed to look at Hannibal a little longer. "Just my hands, nothing too deep. I came here straight away. What about you?"

Hannibal turned his wrist, wincing slightly. "Mr. Budge was a worthy adversary, but I am not so badly injured. The stab to the thigh will take some time to heal, but it missed the bone, and all else is superficial."

Will took a deep breath. Hannibal was alright. He turned on the ignition and started to drive. "I didn't see Tobias's body," Will said.

Hannibal paused. Will could only see half of the encounter in Hannibal's injuries and defensive wounds. He might inspect the body, look one last time on Tobias's face. "I broke his arm," Hannibal said quietly, "And punched him in the solar plexus, among other blows exchanged. It's possible that I didn't need to kill him, Will. I could have tried to subdue him. But I thought he had killed you, so I took the stag statue and crushed his skull."

Will took a very slow breath. His knuckles clenched around the steering wheel. *I was worried you were dead*. The feathered stag, galloping through his subconscious -- so that's where the image had come from. Will frowned. He could sort out that symbology later. "Is that what you said in your statement?" Will asked.

"I omitted some details, which I will be forthcoming about, should they question me again."

"It's still self defense."

"Yes," Hannibal agreed. "Tobias would have gone to any lengths to kill me. I now know what it's like to kill my fellow man, as you know."

"I didn't need to empty my entire clip into Garret Jacob Hobbs," Will said bitterly.

"It was still self defense." Hannibal repeated his own words back to him.

"Not entirely." Will licked his lips. They were echoes, each of them. Symbiosis. "What did it feel like to take a life?"

"I thought of you, Will," Hannibal said. "Only you."

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Will parked the car in Hannibal's drive. They made it to the door before Will grabbed Hannibal by the lapels and kissed him, hard, prying his mouth open with his tongue so he could taste him, be inside him and feel that Hannibal was alive, that they were both so fucking alive. Hannibal groped at the lock as they kissed, and they stumbled through the threshold, the door banging against the wall. Will fumbled his glasses away in a pocket and tore his own coat off while Hannibal closed the door properly, and then Will's hands were on his coat again, peeling it off his shoulders with some care for Hannibal's injured arm. Hannibal let Will drop the coat to the floor, and then put his hand under Will's jaw, backing him up to the wall. Will saw the burning edge of desire in Hannibal's eyes, and then his mouth was on Will's neck, scraping teeth against skin, sucking livid bruises as Will panted out his name. Will fumbled at the buttons of Hannibal's vest and shirt. Hannibal lifted Will's shirt and sweater up over his head and pressed against him with a growl, kissing every inch of skin, fingers digging into his hips. "Oh god, you're alive," Will moaned. "You're *alive*."

"Yes," Hannibal breathed, mouthing at Will's chest. He bit Will's nipple and sucked until Will banged his fist against the wall.

"Take your shirt off," Will said, arching against the wall, feeling wild. "Or I'll rip it off."

"Do it."

Will grabbed the hem of his shirt (blue, finely striped) and tore it open in two yanks, buttons clacking to the floor. Hannibal shrugged out of it, eyes and mouth heavy with lust. Will wrapped him in his arms, skin against skin, one hand in his hair.

"Will," Hannibal pleaded. He grabbed his ass and forced their hips together, both hard, aching.

"Are we going to make it upstairs?" Will said between kisses, grinning.

Hannibal squeezed him, hung his head and caught his breath. He was shaking, almost imperceptibly. Will stroked the back of his neck. Something was expanding in Will's chest, warm and golden and pressing against every seam, threatening to burst -- but it didn't burst, it just grew ever larger.

Hannibal looked up at him, framing his face with both hands. "I think we will."

Hannibal's words were like the bellow to the flames: Will was bright as the sun, alive, so alive, and looking away from Hannibal's dark amber eyes was impossible, because their gaze was one. Will saw himself in it, lost himself in it. Their eyes were the same. Looking and being seen, a mirror and a figure and both of them the reflection, because Hannibal was alive, here, now, because Will was here to see him. Hannibal tugged him forward and they walked to the stairs. Will got an arm under Hannibal's shoulder to help him, head tilted so he could still look at his face.

At the entrance to the bedroom they turned towards each other and kissed tenderly. Will disentangled then to take a step back and look at Hannibal properly. His eyes caught on the wound on his left arm, and he lifted it for inspection. The wire had wrapped around Hannibal's forearm several times, digging so deep through the fabric of his suit that the marks were clear on his skin. The skin wasn't broken, but blood vessels had burst underneath, leaving a snaking line of a bruise which was surrounded by yellow. Will kissed the skin breathlessly.

"It's almost funny," Will said into the breath-bated quiet. "His murder weapon of choice was steel wire. Maybe he was serenading the Marionette Murderer."

Hannibal lifted Will's hand and examined the wounds made by the same instrument. His hands and wrists hadn't been covered and the wire had cut through skin. Will hadn't cleaned it, and there was excess dried blood, the skin indented and deeply bruised. "It's possible," Hannibal said, kissing Will's wrist and tasting briefly the coppery tang of his dried blood. "Or it could be poetic coincidence."

Will tugged at his own belt. He was trembling, a repetitive tic of his head, like he was shuddering back into himself after stepping into the dark recesses of a killer's mind. Hannibal found the movements fascinating, beautiful, the way Will couldn't fully control his body and now, in his presence, didn't care to -- nearly tripping as he stepped out of his pants, looking up at Hannibal desperately, a shattering cup next to a stone pillar. Hannibal thought of the kintsugi vase downstairs, made stronger through breaking, seams of gold. Will threw himself at Hannibal, holding his skull to kiss him, as Hannibal calmly undid his own trousers and slipped out of them.

They collapsed on the bed, Will grinding on top of him. "*Hannibal*." So needy, shameless. Will leaned over Hannibal and spat into his palm, taking them both in his hand and stroking slowly. Hannibal arched up, a low moan escaping his lips.

"God, you're - you're--" Will panted, face screwing up and then unfolding with each harsh breath.

"Yes," Hannibal hissed, cupping Will's cheek. "And you, so perfect."

Hunched over Hannibal, Will looked down at their lengths laying flush against each other in his hand, an unbelieving look on his face. It was so much -- the way his hand could barely contain them, the pulse that could not be distinguished between them, the way Hannibal's foreskin slipped to reveal the head of his cock as Will pulled down. Still feeling urgent, he nonetheless endeavored to touch them in every way, exploratory. Will hadn't had many opportunities to touch Hannibal, and he marveled at the way they felt pressed together. Now it was his turn to elicit sounds of pleasure from Hannibal, who was quiet, low thrums in his throat emerging in tense sighs. Hannibal stroked Will's hips, permitting his experimental touch, but with a glance up Will could see the other man's impatience. Hannibal's urges were plain to see but he held them at bay, lips trembling. He always held himself back, each word and expression slightly delayed and calculated, ingrained, and Will wondered at how difficult it was for Hannibal -- not to hold back, but to let go. It was entirely too much, and Will found himself panting open-mouthed. He thumbed the head of Hannibal's cock, pressing into the slit, and Hannibal lifted his hips, head thrown back in exquisite struggle.

Will kissed him, letting him know that he was done teasing, and Hannibal licked up into his mouth greedily, pulling him close. Hannibal spun them over and pinned Will's hands over his head, biting his lip, slotting himself between Will's legs. Will tugged his arms, forcing Hannibal to put pressure to restrain him, gasping into his mouth. "God, please," Will hissed as Hannibal sucked at his neck. "Anything, everything you want."

Hannibal growled, tongue flicking at the pulse point of Will's neck. Will could feel Hannibal's desire -- he wanted to ravish Will, fucking him slowly until Will cursed and was weak with pleasure, then taking him hard until he screamed; wanted his hands in Will's hair, wanted gentle torture, then Will to take his own pleasure riding on top; and beneath it all, the ultimate loss of control, a dark and amorphous desire to consume Will. In essence, Hannibal wanted too much, and Will saw the moment he struggled to decide which pleasure to pursue as Hannibal rested his forehead against Will's and breathed hard.

"The things you do to me," Hannibal said in a low voice, and the simple words pulsed through Will and drew a heavy groan from his lips. Hannibal adjusted his grip so he could hold Will's wrists with one hand. With his free hand, Hannibal slipped his cock underneath Will so it slid between his cheeks, making his decision known. Will cried out in relief, his heart aching in his chest.

They looked at each other, Hannibal fierce and admiring, Will astounded and overflowing. "Are you sure?" Will managed to ask.

Hannibal breathed deep, and paused to chose his words. "I considered the possibility of losing you tonight," he said simply. "I refute that possibility."

Will nodded, eyes hazy. They kissed until they could only gasp and snatch at each other's mouths, Will struggling occasionally against his wrists. Hannibal leaned to the side to reach the bedside table. He finally let go of Will's wrists to sit up and open the jar of lube, and Will reached towards him instantly, stroking his knees. Hannibal grabbed Will by the hips and pulled him further onto his lap, and then slicked up his fingers. There was urgency mounting between them, their needs approaching the boiling point, but Hannibal still took his time opening Will up. At first Will wanted to snap that he was ready, but Hannibal wasn't teasing Will. For Hannibal, this part was an extension of sex, and the low notes in Hannibal's breathing told Will that he more than enjoyed it. The slide of his finger sent chills down Will's spine as much as it stoked the molten gold in his pelvis. So much sensation: the silk under his skin, the hot stretch of his muscle, Hannibal's fingers filling him up, and with his other hand slow strokes to Will's cock. He felt slick, and heavy, and each stroke and thrust were thick lines weaving his pleasure into solidity.

Will hadn't noticed Hannibal grab a condom with the lube, and when he heard the foil tear Will refocused his gaze. "Do we have to?" Will asked, and seeing the confusion cross Hannibal's face, Will added quickly, "The condom, I mean?"

A smile flickered across Hannibal's face. "I was tested and found negative two months ago."

"Uh." Will closed his eyes for a moment. "I haven't been tested in years, but it was negative, and there wasn't anyone since. Although, maybe it would be better if I did again," he mumbled, with a moment of self-consciousness, "never mind."

Hannibal leaned forward and kissed Will, smiling. "My dear Will," he muttered against his skin, "what temptations you lay before me."

Will chuckled, wrapping his arms around Hannibal's shoulders and nosing his neck. "Sorry, I don't mind."

"We will get you tested soon," Hannibal said, kissing Will again. "But for now, we must cope with a small barrier between us."

Will nodded, squeezing Hannibal's hips between his thighs. Hannibal still had two fingers inside Will, and resumed gentle rubbing and stretching as he deftly pulled the condom from the wrapper. Will tilted his head back against the pillow, grinding his hips down in impatience. Hannibal rolled the condom down himself. And then his fingers were slowly moving from Will, and there was a moment of emptiness, where he reached for Hannibal with shaking hands; and then Hannibal lifted Will's legs over his shoulders, bending him in half; and then Will felt Hannibal push against his entrance, pressure and heat, until like the inevitable inhalation after a long sigh, Hannibal slid inside.

Will froze for a moment, mouth open in shock. Hannibal slid into him slow, and it was only when he was fully seated inside Will that Will gasped for breath. "Oh God, you're--" He drew breath like coming up out of water, Hannibal was inside of him, he could feel him, like their bodies were the same, and he moaned loudly, his chest full to bursting. Eyes hazy, he fought to look into Hannibal's eyes, dark and almost red in the shadow cast by his deep brow, unfathomable depths, close and infinite. Hannibal clutched Will's thighs, wincing deeply, his swollen length flush with the velvet smooth walls, clutching, shuddering. Hannibal breathed deep, savoring. It was perfect. Hannibal slid back slow, until only his head was inside Will, and thrust deep.

His rhythm was slow but forceful, hair usually so perfectly combed clinging to his forehead with a sheen of sweat. Hannibal leaned forward, a hand on the bed, and mouthed at Will's leg as he moved. Hot and heavy, each thrust driving a cry from Will, who clutched at the sheets for dear life. Hannibal rocked slowly, back and hips curling sensuously, picking up the pace so carefully, so attentively. "Yes," Will mouthed, eyes blurring with tears, and as Hannibal drove into him each gasp became a half-formed plea of his name, "Hannibal -- Hannibal -- hahh."

Hannibal kissed his leg, face turned into it, brows pinched deeply in pleasure. He bit softly into the flesh of Will's calf.

Faster now, Hannibal leaned on his elbows over Will, whose legs twitched, dangling in the air. He breathed hot by Will's face, both too exhausted by the feeling of their merging to kiss, but kept their mouths close, Hannibal's quiet grunts mingling with Will's keening. And then, a thread snapped, and Hannibal grabbed Will's hair, thrusting into him fast and hard, and Will moved up against him with what little leverage he could manage, desperate to have him more. Hannibal slipped an arm under the small of Will's back and snapped his hips forward, driving him against the headboard.

Hannibal didn't give in completely though. With a growl he snapped at the threads of his control, and lifted up, grabbing the base of his cock to stave off orgasm. Will lay before him, sweat shined and flushed and beautiful. Hannibal breathed deep, memorizing the sensation of Will around him for the first time, so open to him and tight and strong, head jerking erratically. Hannibal took Will's cock and stroked him to slow thrusts, pushing him to the edge.

"Close," Will hissed, hands against the headboard and pushing down.

"Come apart for me," Hannibal said, almost too low to hear. Will tried to meet his eyes, but it was too much, his vision swam.

"Hannibal, I, I--" Words were useless, utterly inadequate to describe the well of feeling inside Will, brimming and boiling and aching like a lethal wound, one Will would never recover from, but would bleed him out slowly, his whole life gushing out into Hannibal's open arms. Will felt the flutter of inky black feathers, the ominous undulations of the stag galloping through the woods, an edge of light in the dark as the metal wire pulled tight. His orgasm rolled from him like a crashing wave, washing him of all thought; and as Will clenched around him, Hannibal took his own pleasure, thrusts harsh and uneven, and they were both so alive, and Will was so close and yet so far away, and Hannibal came, and --

Breath. Trembling muscles. Sweat on skin. The two men lay in utter exhaustion, hot bodies cooling and relaxing slowly. Hannibal grew soft in Will but was loathe to move, so he stayed for a while with his ear over Will's heart. It was inches away, beyond muscles and ribs and lungs, and if Hannibal could cradle it in his hands it would beat even after being removed from Will's chest, so sure in its duty to be alive. Though impractical, Hannibal would feel it pulse in his mouth until the

electrical impulses died completely. And then it would be meat, and Will would be meat. Hannibal kissed him, his longing an uncomfortable weight in his chest.

"I'll be back," Hannibal whispered. He slid out of Will, careful for the man's sensitivity. It was over; it would never be the first time again, and in a brilliant flash Hannibal wanted to kill Will to keep this moment forever. He shook the notion from his head and staggered from bed, slowly moving to the bathroom to dispose of the condom and clean himself.

The warm water over his hands did little to bring Hannibal back to himself. He looked at his reflection, and though he did not have Will's gift of seeing, Hannibal knew himself. There were conflicting feelings in his eyes: the post-coital glow, the satisfaction of having Will for himself, but also disappointment in the wake of feeling so connected. There were miles and dark secrets separating Hannibal from Will, impossible distances to cross, and Hannibal knew in that instant that he wanted Will to know him completely. But of course, if he did, Hannibal would likely be rejected. Likely? No, it was impossible for Will to know him and accept him fully. Hannibal could push and prod Will in the right direction, could train him -- he had been. He had such plans for Will.

That wasn't the same as having Will honestly and untampered.

Hannibal shook his head, as romantic notions of unconditional acceptance turned bitter on his tongue. There was no need to mourn that impossibility. The road ahead of Hannibal was long, but what lay at the end would be worth the wait: the teacup coming back together. Not reforming exactly as before, perhaps coming together with gold seams, beautiful scars making the cup stronger.

Until then, Will would give himself to Hannibal completely, and Hannibal would give pieces of himself.

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In the following week, Will and Hannibal slipped into the beginnings of a routine. Both Hannibal and Will worked in the late morning and afternoons. The Doctor had the luxury of only taking three or four appointments a day, whereas Will had class twice a week. By some miracle Jack didn't call Will to view a crime scene this week, so Will occupied himself at Quantico. Even though he should work on course prep, more often than not Will read through the Marionette Murderer's emails.

Will spent a few nights at Hannibal's house, meeting him after work. Hannibal would cook an amazing dinner and Will would keep him company in the kitchen, discussing their days and Will's new thoughts about the Marionette. They would eat at the dining room table, and often took drinks into the study to sit by the fire, Will's anticipation mounting. The firelight would flicker across the statuesque features of Hannibal's face as he decided what to do for the rest of the evening.

Most nights, Hannibal would tie Will in red or black rope, the designs and knots becoming more elaborate as Hannibal's practice bore fruit. The pressure of rope against his skin was enough to calm Will's erratic mind, beginning a state of heightened sensitivity. Then Hannibal would set out to break Will down.

Overstimulation was the most direct way to push Will to his breaking point, and being a sadist, Hannibal most often chose pain as his instrument. The crop, a length of rope, or his own hands and mouth, drawing ragged cries from Will until all he could do was whimper, mind empty of killers and antlers and wire. Then Hannibal would take care of him.

Despite the obvious attraction between them, they didn't always engage sexually, Will's need for relief taking priority. Will told himself that he could be patient like Hannibal, sustaining his lust on deep kisses and the way Hannibal touched him when Will was restrained. Will tried to tell himself that they had time, but the thought rang hollow. And then, after their Friday appointment, Will pushed Hannibal against the kitchen counter, dropped to his knees, and took Hannibal in his mouth until he came with a growl and a yank of Will's dark curls. Dinner was late that night.

Will's mind knew no rest. He dug his fingers into bruises to calm the snapping of razor wire at work. At night in Wolf Trap, when he couldn't sleep and it became too much, Will would text Hannibal and asked for permission to hurt himself.

Hannibal instructed him.

Will didn't sleep well. In Hannibal's bed he mostly slept through the night but would still wake exhausted. Only once did he wake in the middle of the night from a dream where he needed to scream but couldn't, thrashing in the sheets, and Hannibal held him close, soothing him until Will returned exhausted to his disturbed sleep. In Will's own bed, he barely slept. The difference between waking and sleeping was blurred, and Will would come back to himself wandering the fields outside his house, disoriented and bare feet covered in scratches. He started sleeping in thick wool socks.

Their arrangement didn't feel stable or steady. It was more like Will was fraying at the seams, and Hannibal gave him the ability to ground himself, taking Will apart and putting him back together so that the man could face another day.

On Saturday Will slept in, mercifully catching a few hours of restful sleep. He showered and threw on a robe, finding Hannibal of course in the kitchen, preparing brunch. Will helped Hannibal set the table with fresh fruit, eggs Benedict with hollandaise, and thinly cut prosciutto artfully arranged in towers over a bed of fresh greens. It was tempting to laze about Hannibal's house all day in a robe, but Will missed his dogs and didn't want to bother his neighbor again by asking her to let them out. Hannibal offered to go with him, but Will laughed at the suggestion.

"I haven't had time to clean, please don't subject yourself to that."

"I am sure I can survive a little mess," Hannibal replied.

"There's dog hair. Everywhere," Will said pointedly. "Do you even own any clothes you wouldn't mind getting dirty?"

Hannibal smiled. "I could always send you the dry cleaning bill."

In the end, Will went home by himself but returned that evening for dinner. As Hannibal boiled sticky rice for chirashi sushi and arranged his palette of benishoga, salmon roe, green shiso, and raw fish, Will scrolled through the Marionette's emails. He had downloaded them all to his phone, and often glanced through their correspondence when he needed something to focus on. Marcus and *ii* made reference to chat room conversations they had between email chains, which the FBI had been unable to find. The shape of those conversations were like distorted shadows. There was

one in particular that Will wished he could read, that was referenced to in a lengthy apology Marcus made. He had 'unloaded' on *ii* without considering her mental state, then had grown angry when she became uncomfortable with the conversation. It sounded like it had been an innocuous argument, but Marcus went to great length to explain himself and apologize, and Will wondered -- how *ii* could easily provoke Marcus into confessing something traumatic, then withdraw support and spin it all so that Marcus felt guilty for 'unloading' in the first place. Compulsive manipulative behavior. His eyes kept returning to something *ii* wrote:

> *We're the same. That's why I was so upset. It was like talking to a younger version of myself who didn't understand that it was possible to get beyond the pain, even though I know. It's unfair to you, but I want to shake you awake from your self-imposed helplessness because you don't know what you will become.*

The words were ones that haunted Will throughout the day, repeating in his head until he could feel them as soft blows to his skull, something trying to break out. *We're the same.* The Marionette thought of herself as an inevitable murder weapon, lifted by the design of fate to kill men. Then did she want to defy fate by killing her surrogate? Was she saying that she couldn't stop? But her kills were meticulously planned; she wasn't a compulsive killer.

Will's thoughts were interrupted suddenly by an incoming call flashing across the screen. He didn't recognize the Baltimore number. He looked up at Hannibal, who gave a slight nod, permitting Will to answer it. The rice was just coming off the stove.

"Hello?" Will asserted.

"Will Graham," came the saccharine and familiar voice on the other line. "So nice to speak with you. Can we schedule your interview, or is now a bad time?"

Will was momentarily stunned. "Freddie Lounds?" he said incredulously. From across the counter, Hannibal looked up sharply. "How did you get my number?"

"Never mind that," Freddie replied, and Will could hear her roll her eyes. "How is next Wednesday? You don't have classes after all."

"I'm not giving you an interview," Will grumbled, removing his glasses to pinch his nose.

"Oh yes you are," Freddie said in a chipper voice.

Will sighed. "And why would I do that?" he asked, when it was painfully clear that Freddie was waiting for him to do so.

"An exclusive interview with the FBI's brilliant psychopath... profiler. I would prefer to run *that* story than the one about you sleeping with your FBI appointed psychiatrist."

Will froze.

"How is the good doctor by the way?"

Will's mouth was dry. Hannibal was also still, watching attentively for clues to the conversation. Will turned away from him so he wouldn't see the rage flicker across his features. "What are you talking about?" he said with feigned exasperation.

"Oh, don't even try. I've got pics."

Mortification stabbed at him, until he realized that there was no way Freddie could have a picture of himself tied up. Hannibal's curtains were always drawn. But then, what did she have pictures of? They weren't affectionate in public.

Except for the night Hannibal was attacked by Tobias. Hannibal had glanced Freddie in the crowd, and then at the door Will was impatient and --

His phone buzzed against his ear. He looked down at the screen to see the image already painted in his head: he and Hannibal kissing at the door, his hands fisted in Hannibal's coat, and the light above catching in unmistakable clarity the hungry snarl of their mouths. Will felt nauseous. He walked to the glass kitchen doors and peered out, knowing he would only see the high ivy-covered walls of Hannibal's property, but needing to check nonetheless.

"So?" Freddie said into the silence. "Interview Wednesday?"

"That's not going to happen," Will hissed.

"Oh well. You might want to talk with Doctor Lecter though. You've already got a soiled reputation, but Lecter's a reputable man of high society, just *think* of how they'll eat this up. Not to mention the effect on his psychiatric practice."

"You fucking bitch," Will snarled. She was provoking him, successfully, like she so often did. "Blackmailing an FBI agent? Wish I could say you've sunk low but you're already made your home among the muck."

"I'm just choosing between two stories," Freddie said, unaffected by the venom in Will's voice. "Sex sells, after all."

"Fuck you."

"I'll let you think it over," Freddie said lightly. "If I don't hear from you in two days I'll run the story about you and the Doctor; unless you give me something better." She hung up.

Will just barely resisted throwing his phone against the floor, shoving it violently into his pocket instead. He was furious, shoulders tense and heart hammering. "Oh my fucking god," he spat, clenching and unclenching his fists.

"Will?" Hannibal's voice was calm. He had walked around the counter and towards Will, who kept his back to the doctor as if he could delay the inevitable. Hannibal stopped a few paces away. "Are you alright?"

Will laugh. "Not really." He sighed, and turned, looking at Hannibal apologetically. "Freddie Lounds is blackmailing me for an interview with a photo of us making out on your front steps."

Hannibal's brows raised. "Ah."

"Great, just -- great." Will flopped down in a stool by the counter, hiding his head in his hands. "What the fuck am I going to do?"

Hannibal sat down next to him. "What are your options?" he promoted.

Will ran his hand through his hair, a tense smile on his face. "Can 'murder Freddie Lounds' be an option? Think the court would rule it pest control."

Hannibal huffed in amusement.

"You're not freaking out about this?" Will asked with a frustrated sigh at the doctor's impenetrable calm.

"I'll leave the 'freaking out' to you," Hannibal said with a smile.

Will rolled his eyes. "Right. Okay. I was joking about the murder."

"So glad you clarified."

Will chuckled, some of the anger and tension dissipating. "Okay. My options are one: give Freddie Lounds an interview, and suffer through her company and probing, idiotic, leading questions. I would have to witness her erasing the photos. Of course, I can't fucking trust her to get rid of copies. Did I mention I would have to spend time talking to Freddie Lounds?"

"You did."

"So that's a terrible option," Will said. "And might well lead to murder, so. Option two." Will cleared his throat and looked at his hands. "Let her run the picture. Face my scandalized peers and suffer through Zeller and Price's jokes. Get yelled at by Jack, you get yelled at by Jack, we all get yelled at by Alana. I cease being your unofficial patient--" his voice caught. "Jack won't trust my mental state. He'll assign me another psychiatrist to *evaluate* me." Will shook his head, the word venom on his tongue.

Hannibal squeezed his shoulder. Will looked at him. "And I can't even imagine what it would do to you," Will said. "The gossip, what people will say."

"It would be unpleasant," Hannibal said, but his voice was gentle. "Though my reputation is unmarried by scandal, I am not so beholden to it that I would terribly mind. I also do not care if people know I am gay; it would certainly deter some unwanted and clumsy courtship attempts."

Will stared. "You're bisexual."

"I'm unconcerned with labeling my sexuality."

"Well, good for you!" Will claimed, throwing up his hands. "I'm glad it's no big deal, but it is for me. This isn't just about sleeping with my FBI appointed psychiatrist. I've never been out, and I don't want it to be anyone else's god damn business!"

Hannibal considered him. "It would bother you to be perceived as gay."

"It would bother me if it got out like *this*," Will clarified. "And any attempt to clarify my bisexuality would be seen as... as..." He shook his head. "God, I haven't thought about this in years. I'm not prepared. I don't want to share this with anyone."

Hannibal rubbed small, soothing circles in his back. "I understand. No matter what other people think, we will have each other. What exists between you and I is unknowable to others; whatever they think they know, it cannot touch us."

Will rubbed his eyes. "I know you feel beyond it all, but I do care."

"Of course," Hannibal replied. "You have every right to be upset. Freddie Lounds has been unspeakably rude to you, after all."

Chapter End Notes

Will finally gets the d! -confetti-

Lure

Chapter Summary

"It's still struggling a bit," Will said. "Abigail, can you take the net?"

"Got it," Abigail said, with a fishing net in hand.

"It suits you," Will said to her with a smile.
°°°°°°°°°°°

Freddie Lounds is a problem, and Will is crashing. He's lucky to have the good Doctor to take care of him.

Chapter Notes

oh boy these chapters are getting LONG and there's still so much to get to! I'm trying to pace myself o__o everything is more or less outlined so I have an estimated chapter count now. yikes guys, it's going to get /bad/.

I love Freddie and all the women of Hannibal. I will fight anyone who doesn't appreciate their characterization!! :D

to clarify, I head-cannon Will as autistic (because duh??) tho he hasn't been diagnosed with anything ever.

cw: non-consensual touching while unconscious

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Freddie Lounds's apartment wasn't modest, it was cramped. The bare necessities were coupled with splurge purchases: only two chairs besides the couch, and two different fur coats hanging by the door. Freddie didn't have company, ever, usually ordered take out, and spent her money on knock-off designer purses and camera lenses rather than cloth napkins. Her apartment was functional and private, the place she wrote and dolled herself up for the world.

Freddie was not happy that Will was here, but she was trying to hide it.

Will knew that if he was going through with this interview he would have to secure the upper hand. So he made plans to meet Freddie at a cafe, and then ambushed her outside of her apartment. "My plans changed," he explained, crowding into her personal space. "You have an hour of my time, now, and then I'm leaving."

So, no, Freddie wasn't pleased to have her subject analyzing her apartment, but she smiled nonetheless and said, "Please, have a seat."

Will took one of the two chairs by a small circular table, in between the open kitchen and living room, hanging his jacket on the back. "I'll take some coffee," he said easily.

"Of course, Mr. Graham." Freddie went to the coffee machine, still wearing her heels that clip-clipped against the tile, giving her tiny figure an extra two inches. Will reached into his bag. By the time Freddie had returned with two cups of black coffee (not asking if Will wanted cream or sugar; he wouldn't put it past her to know his coffee preferences, but also doubted she had cream) Will had set the legal form on the table. She eyed it with arched, penciled brows, impressed.

Hannibal had gotten his lawyer to write up a release form for Will's interview. Freddie would be permitted to record their interview but under no circumstances release the audio. All photos of Will and or Hannibal would be deleted including copies, or else they would take her to court. It wasn't foolproof in the slightest, because Freddie Lounds was utterly unscrupulous, but it was something. Freddie sat opposite Will and read the form carefully.

"Is this really necessary?" she asked with a playful smile, batting her eyelashes.

Will gave her a dead stare and didn't respond. Sighing, she signed her name with a flourish. Will checked it over as she withdrew a recorder from her purse. She was pissed, and Will practically glowed with satisfaction.

Brushing her voluminous red curls out from her face, Freddie stared at Will with bright blue eyes. Will avoided meeting her gaze, determined that he would not remove his glasses, not open his mind to the tabloid reporter, no matter how she goaded him. Freddie smiled, and began recording with a flick of a manicured nail.

"So," she said sweetly. "Will Graham. It is such a pleasure to have you. How are you today?"

"Fine," Will replied tersely.

"Let's jump right in," Freddie said, and then paused to take a sip of coffee. "You started your career in the New Orleans Police Department, is that right?"

"Yes, I was a Homicide Detective."

"Why did you enter law enforcement?"

"I wanted to aid in the prevention of crime," Will said dispassionately. Will wouldn't give her more than an inch.

"Why did you leave Homicide?" Freddie asked, even though she no doubt knew the circumstances under which Will had left the department.

If Will avoided the details, Freddie would paint his reticence however she wanted. He took a sip of coffee while he thought. "I'm a poor shot. It wasn't the right job for me."

Freddie seemed unconcerned by his short answers. For a moment, Will thought she would jump to his shooting of Hobbs, but she didn't.

"Then you studied forensic science at George Washington University," she said. "And immediately joined the FBI's lab."

"That's correct."

"Why didn't you become an FBI field agent?"

Will schooled the tense smile from his face. "I am more suited to work outside of the field," he replied.

"Ah." Freddie tapped her perfect nails on the table. "But you attempted to become an agent. You didn't pass the psych exam, why is that?"

"No comment."

"Was it just because you're autistic, or did they discover that you were emotionally unstable?"

Will's jaw clenched. "No comment."

Freddie shrugged, moving swiftly to the next question. "So after a number of years in the lab, you became a professor at Quantico. What do you teach?"

"Forensic criminology and behavioral profiling."

"You've published articles and taught about a number of the most brutal active serial killers, including the Chesapeake Ripper. Many claim that you have a special insight into these killers, and can even step inside their heads." She licked her lips. "Tell me -- what is it like to think like a killer?"

"I interpret the evidence," Will said calmly. He had prepared for this line of questioning. "I am not a psychic. I just happen to be very good at what I do."

"Could you explain to me what an 'empathy disorder' is?"

How well do you know your stuff, Ms. Lounds? Will thought with an inward smile. "Alexithymia is a so-called 'empathy disorder' wherein the person has the inability to distinguish and relate to the emotions of others," Will said clinically. "Though primarily alexithymia is characterized by the person's inability to relate emotions to themselves."

A confused look passed over Freddie's face, and Will couldn't help but smirk. Before she could respond, Will added, "There is no personality disorder on the books for someone with an excess of empathy."

"Is that because you refuse to be studied?"

Will sipped his coffee. "I don't have a personality disorder."

"That has been diagnosed," Freddie added. "You've refused numerous psychologists who have offered to make you a case study."

Will snorted. *Offered*, like it would be an honor to have a shrink poke clumsily in his brain, or show him flashing images to test how quickly he could read expressions.

Freddie leaned forward, and he caught a whiff of her perfume — citrus and something earthy and sweet. "Are you afraid of what they will find?" she asked quietly.

"No," Will said calmly, staring at her chin.

"Because you could easily conceal your psychopathy, or because you truly believe there's nothing wrong with you?"

Will's lip twitched. *You have no idea what's wrong with me.* She didn't have him trapped, but he would have to answer carefully. "If by 'something wrong with me' you mean neurodivergence, I know that the way my mind works is not typical. As you have already said, I have autistic traits. I have more than the average number of mirror-neurons, which allow me to read micro-expressions easily, and empathize with people."

"Like serial killers," Freddie said.

Will frowned. "I can empathize with anyone."

"So with your special insight, you can understand these killers's motivations and feelings. You make logical leaps that others have called miraculous. It's quite the party trick, Mr. Graham."

Will said nothing. It wasn't a trick, but he didn't need to prove himself to her.

"What does a killer feel when they take a life?" Freddie asked.

Will shrugged. "I imagine they feel all sorts of things: anger, desperation, arousal, relief; and of course there are some killers who feel nothing at all save for the cold satisfaction of a job well done."

"You 'imagine'? You said you empathize with serial killers."

“No, you said that. I study killers,” Will corrected. “Understanding is not the same as feeling how a killer feels.”

Freddie narrowed her eyes, disbelieving. Then her face relaxed, and she fixed him with a bright, curious look. “What did you feel when you killed Garett's Jacob Hobbs?"

"Frightened," Will replied. It was true -- he had felt scared as Abigail bled out on the kitchen floor. He had also felt fear and repulsion towards the growing satisfaction in his chest, the elation of power that shook through him.

"See?” Hobbs whispered in his ear.

Will jolted, spilling some coffee on his hand. He cursed, and wiped it quickly on his pants, the hairs on the back of his neck standing on end. Freddie stared at him with wide eyes. "Sorry," Will mumbled.

Freddie stood and got him a paper towel to wipe up the coffee. "You're a bit twitchy, Mr. Graham. I apologize if I said something to unsettle you." Will pinched the bridge of his nose, ignoring her. She sat back down, crossing her legs nearly. "Did Garett Jacob Hobbs love Abigail?"

Yes Will nearly said, insulted that Freddie had to ask. Of course he loved his daughter, he loved her *so much* that he couldn't bear the thought of separation. Will shook his head. No, those were

Hobbs's feelings, not his own. Hobbs's anger that Freddie would insinuate that he didn't love his daughter. Will bit the inside of his mouth. "I don't want to talk about Abigail."

"Do you love her like a daughter?" Freddie pressed. "You visit her often in the hospital, even though you're the one who killed her father. I'm surprised she even allows you to see her." She smiles. "Or does she see you as a replacement for her dearly departed dad?"

"No comment," Will hissed. He checked his watch. They had only been talking for twenty minutes.

"Poor girl," Freddie said with a click of her tongue. "No parents and no place to call home, bored to death in that hospital, and all she has for friends are shrinks and a lonely FBI profiler." Her eyes flashed dangerously. "Do you want to know what she thinks of you? We had a fascinating conversation about you the last time we met."

Rage crept like hot pin-pricks up his spine. "Stay away from her," Will growled.

Freddie was utterly unfazed, delighted even in his protective fury. "She reached out to me," she explained gently. "Abigail needs a friend who can help her tell her story. She has the right to tell the world her side of things instead of living in fear."

"Ah, yes," Will snarled. "You're doing this out of your infinite compassion."

"I do care what happens to Abigail," Freddie said, and Will knew her tongue was slippery but he didn't hear a lie. *That's because she's constantly lying,* he reminded himself. "You may not believe me, but I do. And of course I don't mind the money or prestige. I care about my work as well."

Will snorted. "You're exploiting her."

Freddie frowned. "Denying a victim autonomy over her own story isn't very *empathetic* of you."

"Neither is twisting and sensationalizing it," Will snapped. "You just can't help sticking your venomous claws in other people's lives. Leave Abigail alone." His voice pitched low.

"Is that a threat, Mr. Graham?" Freddie asked, still unperturbed.

Will ground his teeth, and thought about stuffing her hair down her throat. He closed his eyes and sighed, pushing down on one of the bruises below his collar bone. "No, Freddie," he said slowly.

"Since you're so sensitive about Abigail, lets switch topics," Freddie said eagerly. "We were talking about your insight into the mentality of killers. Your last case was the killer known as the Maestro, who rather dramatically staged a human cello in the symphony. What motivates someone to do that?"

"He wanted to try a new instrument," Will said bitterly, just relieved that they were off the subject of Abigail. "He had killed before. We found human guts drying on racks in the basement of his music shop. He was treating them like you do cat-gut for string instruments. Budge had been killing for years, completely undetected." He paused. He hadn't really meant to say that much.

"So why did he make a big splash? Wasn't that why he got caught?"

Will nodded. "He wanted attention, so he put on a show."

Freddie tapped her chin thoughtfully. "How did you catch him?"

"There are only so many instrument stores in Baltimore than sell cat-gut string," Will said, not wishing to bring Hannibal into this. It wasn't quite a lie either; the FBI would have found Budge even if Hannibal hadn't tipped Will off.

"After you failed to apprehend him," Freddie said smoothly, "Tobias Budge went to Doctor Hannibal Lecter's office, killed a patient, and then Doctor Lecter killed him. How did he feel?"

Will blinked. "I'm sorry?"

Freddie gave an innocent smile. "How did Hannibal Lecter feel as he murdered Tobias Budge?"

Will froze in his seat. *I thought of you, only of you.* "It was self-defense," he said numbly, the cadaver in the FBI's morgue flashing behind his eyes. He had looked briefly over Tobias's body, confirming Hannibal's story. *I broke his arm.* The black stag statue, held in Hannibal's hands -- the stag's hoof crushing Tobias's skull. *Crunch*.

"But how did Doctor Lecter feel?" Freddie asked again. "Anger, desperation? *Arousal?*"

I thought you were dead.

"Shut the fuck up," Will hissed through clenched teeth. Fuck, she had pissed him off. He needed to collect himself before he said something he would really regret.

"Or just the cold satisfaction of a job well done?" Freddie asked sweetly.

"What would you feel, if you were fighting for your life against a dangerous criminal?" Will shot back.

"I'm sure I don't know," Freddie replied. "I'm not the empath profiler or the person with blood on their hands."

"I don't need to profile Hannibal," Will said tightly. "Self-preservation is not the same as serial murder."

"Unless your self-preservation results in the murder of eight young women."

Will stared. The fog in his head turned sharp and deadly. Scalping Freddie and forcing her entire head of hair down her throat wouldn't be enough. She deserved worse. He felt cold, suddenly, and like he was floating outside of himself. "I'm leaving now," he said very carefully, pushing himself up from the chair.

"It hasn't been a full hour, Will," Freddie warned. "That's not what we agreed on."

Will paused, hand on the back of his chair. He needed to get out of here before he said something terrible or tore his hair out. He breathed out slowly. *Calm down, Will!* "Fine," he muttered. "Just. Can I use your rest room?"

Freddie's lips grew tight. "Of course," she said. She gestured down the short hallway.

Will closed the bathroom door and leaned against it, breathing heavily. That red hair, so tightly curled. How long would it be if he stretched it out? It was thick and strong, he could tie it tight around her wrists until her hands turned purple, lines of red -- Will dug his fingernails into the palm of his hand. He fumbled for the phone in his pocket.

Will: In Freddie's bathroom freaking out. Want to scream and break something.

Will set the phone on the counter and turned on the sink, splashing cold water on his face. He could do this, he just needed to calm down and not think about murdering Freddie. Then he could sit and drink coffee and just say 'no comment' until the hour was up.

The phone buzzed, and Will grabbed it with wet hands. He cursed under his breath as the touch screen failed to recognize his wet fingers, and brushed them dry on his pants.

Hannibal: Leave. This is not worth your mental duress.

Will: The pics!!! Will be a lot more mental duress.

Will watched the small icon that indicated that Hannibal was typing, his head pounding.

Hannibal: We will deal with whatever consequences together. Leave Will. That's a command.

Red hair, razor wire dripping with blood. Will shoved the phone back into his pocket, and dried his face with a hand towel. On top of all the other consequences of having Freddie publish the picture, he didn't want other people to see that moment with Hannibal, the moment his heart cracked open and spilled out with utter desperation that they were both alive. That moment was *his*. Will looked at himself in the mirror, and saw the protective love of Garett Jacob Hobbs reflected in his eyes.

Will left the bathroom calmly, moving his body from a distance and with mild curiosity at the suddenness of his disassociated state. Freddie was seated at the table with an innocent, expected look on her face, confident that she had Will exactly where she wanted him. Will stood behind his chair and removed his glasses, and for the first time in their miserable acquaintance, he looked her in the eyes.

Freddie didn't care if the rest of the interview was a wash. Even if he didn't answer a single other question, she would be satisfied, enthralled by her power over him. *I've got you exactly where I want you. You think you can stay silent? I haven't even started yet. Let's see how long you can hold your tongue.* Years of being condescended, surrounded by people who thought they were so much smarter than her, superior to the low-life tabloid blogger. Frustrating years spent in search of legitimacy and approval, but no major newspaper would take her. She was too much of a risk; just a pretty face, florid writing, and a propensity for pissing off law enforcement. And then, at some point, Freddie Lounds stopped giving a *fuck*. Accepted her audience of crime aficionados, conspiracy theorists, and people with a hard-on for tragedy and gore. Freddie Lounds came into her own. Let everyone else think her so inferior -- they read her articles anyway.

Will snatched the recorder from the center of the table. "Hey -- wait!" Freddie exclaimed.

Will paused it, and showed it to her in his hands. "I'm not deleting it," he said calmly.

Freddie purses her lips, and then leaned back in her chair, crossing her arms. *What now, Mr. Graham?*

"I wasn't threatening you before," Will said, face utterly blank. "But I am now. Delete the photos. Never come near me or Hannibal again."

"Or what, Mr. Graham?" Freddie asked with an innocent expression.

Will thought of the Chesapeake Ripper and the Marionette Murderer, and pulled on their calculating and megalomaniac mentality. Freddie wasn't worth his distress. She was *swine*. Freddie's face grew pale as she saw something monstrous emerge from the depths and paint Will's face as a predator. Her doe-like eyes grew wide, fear and fascination mingling into a delicate scent. The stag snorted behind him. Will didn't need to move into her space to push her to retreat, he just needed to look at her with that hunger. Her shoulders tensed, back flush against the chair.

"You wish to provoke me, but what if you succeed Freddie? Be careful what you wish for." Will tossed the recorder on the table, and Freddie didn't move to catch it as it slid off the edge. Will grabbed his coat and bag and walked out the door.

He didn't need to look back to know that Freddie was smiling.

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Will ignored Hannibal's texts. He was crashing, hard. He drove back to Wolf Trap, grinding his teeth the whole way. He wanted her dead, wanted her bleeding and screaming against a gag of her own hair. She would have to be displayed, humiliated -- no, no! He wasn't a killer, he was just furious, but he wouldn't mind, no, Will wouldn't mind seeing her strung up. He beat his fist against the dashboard, pulled his hair so hard he swerved on the road. He needed to break something before he broke, needed to scream -- but couldn't.

Will collapsed on his couch, surrounded by his dogs who nosed and licked their despondent owner. He was so exhausted. He needed sleep. Will tried to nap on the couch, but his mind wouldn't let him, crows picking at the corpse of his mind. Wouldn't it be nice to lie comfortably impaled on the stag's antlers, screaming until his lungs were torn out?

Hannibal called him, and Will let it go to voicemail, curling up on himself in shame and agony. Then, he bolted upright. What was he doing? He didn't need to bother Hannibal like this. Will fumbled for his phone and sent a quick message.

> *Will: I'm fine went home. Napping call you later.*

Will rubbed his face. His skin was hot and he felt the obsessive thoughts in his head like a hundred paper cuts, like beaks nipping at his flesh. Was human hair strong enough to cut skin? Maybe with the right treatment.

"God," Will shuddered.

He dragged himself to the kitchen and threw open the cabinet, grabbing a bottle of whiskey. He needed something to help him sleep. It was barely one in the afternoon -- fuck it, fuck *everything*. Will drank straight from the bottle and collapsed back on the couch.

When Hannibal called again, Will answered. "Do you think it matters if a feeling is mine or a reflection of someone else's?" he slurred into the phone.

Hannibal was taken aback for a moment. "Yes, I believe it matters," Hannibal replied.

"Like, what if I just want to fuck you because you want to fuck me?" Will asked. "I still want to fuck you, a lot, like really really -- actually, can you come over? I want you to fuck me."

"Have you been drinking?"

"Nooo," Will said, and then giggled. "Maybe. Yes. But answer my question, because I don't think it matters, Hannibal, it doesn't feel like it matters because I feel it so much."

"You can be influenced by the feelings of others," Hannibal said calmly. "Regardless of the intensity with which you feel them, some of your emotions are more honestly your own."

Will snorted. "There's not one self and I don't believe for a second that you believe there is. It's all chemicals and wires firing. What, should I go live like a hermit in bum-fuck-nowhere and meditate on who I really am outside of the influences of others?"

"We make ourselves, Will. We are not made by others."

"Gods among men," Will muttered. "Among the swine." He took another swig of whiskey, and the room span.

Hannibal found Will spread eagled on the couch with a dog on his lap and bottle cradled against his chest, stinking of booze and sweat. Hannibal felt his forehead. "You have a fever," he said, taking the bottle from Will's hands.

Will pouted, unfocused. "How strong's human hair?" he slurred, curling towards the other man. "Don't know if s'strong enough... for my design."

Hannibal carried Will upstairs and showered him, holding his dark curls back as he vomited into the toilet, murmuring between heaves about his design.

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The next day, Freddie published the interview.

Jack was livid.

Will nursed one of the worst and longest hangovers of his life as he sat in Jack Crawford's office, staring at the floor.

"What were you thinking?!" Jack bellowed, waving his phone in Will's face, where the article 'The FBI's Empath Psychopath Hunter' was pulled up. "You know better than this!"

"I wanted the fame." Will smiled bitterly.

"Don't sit in my office and lie to me," Jack said with a groan. "I don't know what possessed you to sit down with Freddie Lounds for a nice chat, but you must have a better excuse than that."

His loud voice pounded in Will's head. "What do you want me to say, Jack?" he hissed. "She pressured me into it."

"If she was pressuring you, you should have come to me!" Jack shouted, and Will winced. "I could have taken care of it."

"Not really," Will muttered.

"How, exactly, did she pressure you?" Jack asked in a low voice.

Will rubbed his temples, and a wave of nausea rolled over him. "Jack, I can't talk about it."

"Why the hell not?!"

Will didn't answer.

With a frustrated huff, Jack sat down behind his desk. "If she's blackmailing you, you need to tell me," he said, some of the anger faded from his voice. "Whatever it is, I don't want to hear it from Freddie Lounds."

Will nearly snickered, imagining the look on Jack's face if he saw the picture Freddie took of his tongue down Hannibal's throat. He disguised it with a cough. "She's trying to write Abigail's book," Will said, not bothering to hide the protective anger from his voice. "She's a vulture, Jack, and Abigail doesn't deserve to have her desecrate the corpse of her childhood."

Jack gave him a piercing look. His scrutiny was so often just a glare. "So you gave Freddie Lounds an interview to dissuade her from going after Abigail?"

"Yes," Will lied.

Jack sighed. "This doesn't make us look good, Will; this reflects badly on me."

"Sorry to ruin your reputation by proxy," Will snapped.

"Get out," Jack said, sounding tired. "Go make yourself useful."

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Sleep evaded him, and snuck up on him when he least expected it. Was he truly awake when he walked with the dogs through the fields, the tree line flickering like a corrupted video file, the grass whispering murderous promises against his legs? If he didn't rest while he was unconscious, could it really be called sleep? In his dreams he was running, chased by or chasing the stag, until he slammed into a web of red wire and cut himself open. Hannibal came to his farm house to cook him dinner and help him sleep. Will was too tired to do anything, and their conversations were brief, but the tea Hannibal made him was warm and calming. Hannibal couldn't always stay over, and when Will woke screaming to an empty bed, he walked until his legs ached, turning back to see his house lit like a beacon in the night. But the sight of that ship on dark waters didn't comfort him anymore.

Freddie called him again.

"How are you, Will?" she asked cheerily.

"What do you want?" Will sat on the edge of his bed. It was 11:08am, and he had no idea how long he had been lying there, or if he had slept at all. What day was it?

"I thought about what you said," came Freddie's voice, all confidence and feigned innocence. "And I think we can strike a new deal."

"You didn't delete the photos."

"Oh, I did," Freddie said. "I signed a contract saying that I would, even though you didn't sit for our whole interview. But I just *happened* to find copies I forgot about this morning."

"Hannibal's lawyer will tear you to pieces," Will hissed.

"Oh, please," Freddie said with exasperation. "You don't want it to come to that. Hear me out, Will, I'm not unreasonable."

"What do you want?" he snapped.

"Tip me off to the next crime scene you're called to," Freddie said. "And I want pictures. You have a camera on your phone, right? Then I'll delete all the photos of you and your boyfriend. An eye for an eye."

"How do I know you'll actually erase the pictures this time?" Will rubbed his eyes. "You'll just keep this hanging over my head."

"I don't particularly want to go to court," she said. "But I think this is fair. After all, we agreed on an hour interview, and you only gave me half. There's nothing I can say to convince you that I'm sincere, except, I suppose, that as tantalizing as the photo of you and Hannibal is, one fresh from the next crime scene is leagues better."

"Fine. Whatever. I'll be in touch." Will hung up on her.

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After dinner, Hannibal sat Will in the armchair by the fire of the study with a cup of hot tea. Without making comment on it, Hannibal had been serving less wine. Will didn't mind. He had yet to succumb to his father's alcoholism, but he obviously wasn't above drinking to excess during self-destructive fits. He stared into the fire, numb and exhausted and as thread-bare as the old sweater he wore.

Hannibal settled in the chair across from him with his drawing pad and pencils. Will curled up into a comfortable ball on the chair. The light of the fire flickered across his gaunt features, catching the curls of his hair in reddish brown tints. Will didn't bother trying to stay still for Hannibal; the man wouldn't give him a cup of tea if he didn't expect him to drink it. It wasn't his usual bedtime concoction, but a blend of ginger, lemon, and camomile.

"I'm sorry I've been so out of it," Will said after a few quiet minutes of pencil scratching against paper and the crackle of the fire.

"No need to apologize," Hannibal said smoothly. "I am happy to take care of you until you feel better."

"And if I don't? Get better?"

Hannibal looked up from his drawing. "You're not sick, Will. You've had a trying week and you're emotionally overwhelmed."

He smiled feebly. "Sure. You're the doctor."

Hannibal's skin glowed from the fire, half in shadows darkly cast from his prominent bone structure. Will thought of drawing him in smudges of charcoal, no lines, just planes of black against the white paper. He knew he didn't have the skill for it, but he could imagine it nonetheless. "Do you think my judgement is clouded by my affection for you?" Hannibal asked. "That I am perhaps overlooking signs of illness?"

"I wanted to kill Freddie Lounds," Will said softly. "I thought about it in such detail. I can't stop thinking, I'm thinking so much it *hurts*, and I feel like I'm going to burst." He choked on the last word, his throat tight. Will drank his tea, trying to focus on the calming sensations of the warmth in his hands and the bright taste of ginger.

"Your thoughts are insistent," Hannibal said. "Quantity is not quality. That your thoughts are on repeat doesn't mean that you are a murderer."

"No," Will said with a smile. "Just that I feel like I am."

"Do you worry that you will harm Ms. Lounds?" Hannibal asked. Will's head swam.

"No, no, I won't *actually* murder her." He laughed darkly. "I'm too close to her. I would get *caught*."

They were both quiet, letting the unsaid implications hang in the air between them. Will watched

the fire, letting the flickering and almost hypnotic movements ease his mind. He would feel nervous voicing these thoughts to anyone else, but not Hannibal. Hannibal wasn't afraid of him, or for him. Will didn't really understand how the Doctor could be so calm in the face of his degrading mental health, but maybe Hannibal saw something Will didn't. Will was having trouble seeing himself and Hannibal clearly through the thicket of wires in his brain. He only saw snatches, not the full image.

"What would you do," Will asked quietly, "if I did kill someone?"

Hannibal set down his pencil and pad, and fixed Will with his gaze. When he spoke his words were carefully chosen. "It depends on the circumstances, Will. We have both killed before."

"You know what I mean. Not in self-defense."

"Do you mean beyond self-defense as delineated by the law?" Hannibal asked. "What about in self-preservation?"

Will frowned. *Self preservation.* That was what Freddie said in reference to Abigail, implying that she had helped her father lure his victims. It was what Will had called Hannibal's killing of Tobias Budge. But Hannibal didn't mean self-defense, and neither had Freddie. This wasn't the reaction he had expected; but what had he expected anyway? "I mean," Will said, clarifying, "if I murdered someone when I didn't have to. Just because I wanted to."

"Do compulsive killers always want to kill?" Hannibal asked. "Are they not forced to kill because of their compulsions?"

Will gave Hannibal a tired look. "You're not answering my question."

"I can't," Hannibal replied. "There are too may unknown factors to your hypothetical situation."

"Regardless of the 'unknown factors' your answer should be 'turn me in to the police'." Will curled in on himself, drinking his tea.

"Would it reassure you to hear that as my answer?" Hannibal asked. He had gone quite still, and with a glance Will found his face unreadable. "Should I promise you that if I felt you were a danger to others or yourself, I would call Jack Crawford and have you institutionalized?"

Will couldn't quite understand what he was hearing. "You mean you *wouldn't*?"

"Do you want to be institutionalized?"

"God, no, of course not!" Will set his tea cup on the small table next to his chair, and carted his hand through his hair. "Hannibal, I'm just trying to figure out why you're so damn calm about all this. Do you... do you not believe me?"

"I believe you, Will," Hannibal reassured him gently. "I believe you empathize so strongly with the killers you study that some of their feelings become your own. I believe that your obsessive mentality coupled with your traumatic occupation has lead to violent thoughts and self-destructive actions." Hannibal paused. "But more importantly, I also believe that you are in control of your actions, and are extremely resilient. You are warring with yourself not against murderous impulses,

but as a battle for your sense of self."

"I think it's a war where both sides are taking heavy casualties."

Hannibal smiled. "You underestimate yourself."

Will sighed and looked up at the ceiling. "What do you suggest I do?" he asked. "I can't stand to feel this way much longer."

"You won't take yourself out of the field. And while I think working cases for Jack is detrimental to your health, I believe there is a good reason why you won't quit. It's not just that you want to save lives, as you most certainly will. A side of yourself has been unearthed through your work in the field, born in the blood of Garett Jacob Hobbs and Abigail. You need to face this awakened aspect of yourself, but you are afraid to do so. That is why you struggle with yourself. That is the source of the pain."

Will closed his eyes. Victim and killer, predator and prey, a stag made of tar and bloody feathers. Suddenly, he remembers being a young boy and finding a pigeon caught in a nest of barbed wire on a broken fence, flapping desperately for its freedom. It would have bled to death trying to escape, had Will not untangled it. "What if I don't like what I find?" he asked. "What if Freddie is right, and I find that the killer inside me isn't Hobbs or the Marionette but myself?"

"We must love and accept ourselves, Will. Even -- especially -- the aspects that others would reject." Hannibal's eyes glinted in the firelight. "It is essential in order to thrive."

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They bathed together in Hannibal's large claw-footed tub, Will leaning against Hannibal's chest. He could nearly stretch his legs out, and teased Hannibal about his absurd luxuries (but of course, the man was beyond teasing.)

"No luxury I allow myself is wasted," Hannibal said, running his hands up and down Will's arms.

"You didn't grow up in trailer parks," Will quipped.

"No."

Will leaned his head against Hannibal's chest, relaxing in the hot water. Classical music played softly from the other room. Will sighed, and Hannibal pressed a hand over his heart. "I really need to sleep," Will said. "I don't think I did at all last night."

Hannibal hummed in consideration, and Will felt the vibrations against his back. "Would you allow me to try a cognitive technique to induce sleep?" he asked.

"Like meditation?"

"Similar," Hannibal replied. "A guided imaginative exercise. I think you would respond well."

Will shrugged. "At this point, I'll try anything."

"Good." Hannibal kissed his neck. "First, let's get you as relaxed as possible." Hannibal trailed his hand lower, circling Will's hips.

Will snorted. "Nice relaxation technique. Do you administer this to all your insomniac patients?"

Hannibal caught his ear lobe between teeth and tugged it playfully. "Only my most difficult patients." He took Will in hand. Despite his exhaustion, he grew hard quickly, and Hannibal growled against his neck. "So responsive."

"Just for you," Will muttered. He meant it as a joke, but it was true -- the way Hannibal touched him brought life into his numb body. Will had spent years ignoring his physical body, the chronic tension in his shoulders, the regular headaches, and only took his pleasure like an unceremonious chore. But everything was different with Hannibal: conversations, eye contact, touch. Hannibal was the exception.

Hannibal took his time, as always, until Will was keening desperately and rolling his hips. Will came slowly, shuddering and hot even in the lukewarm water. Hannibal helped him out of the bath and dried him off, Will relaxed and pliantly allowing the other man to dry his hair. They brushed their teeth and changed into silk pajamas. Hannibal had Will lie on his back on the bed and sat next to him.

"What's next, Doctor?" Will asked with a devilish grin.

"Close your eyes," Hannibal instructed. "And breathe deeply, to a count of three. In... and out... Very good."

Will focused on his breathing. He was already very relaxed, and thoughts of lines and knives were only faint wisps in his mind.

"I want you to picture someplace relaxing. It can be a familiar place, or one of your imagination." Hannibal's voice was low and soothing. "Can you describe it for me?"

The soft red color of his eyelids dispersed, and Will felt the sun on his face. "I'm in a river," Will said. His imagination needed little prompting to recreate the memory place. He could feel the water rushing steadily against his legs. "I'm in my fishing gear."

"What is the weather like?"

Will looked around at the clear sky and sun-dappled shores. "It's nice and sunny. There are only a few clouds in the sky, and little wind."

"I want you to focus on the sound and feel of the water," Hannibal said. Will did. Everything was slightly slower than reality, like he was hyper aware of his surroundings. "Feel the water rush over you." Hannibal's words came from all around, blanketing him in the comforting timber of his voice. "It is not too cold to the touch. Let the water run through your fingers."

Will dropped a hand into the water and felt the current move against his bare skin. "See the light reflected on the water," Hannibal said, "How it flickers across the moving surface, not so bright that

it blinds you. Did you bring your fishing rod?"

"Yes," Will said, drawing the fishing rod out from nowhere. "I hook the fly on the line. It's the perfect season for salmon. They'll be swimming up the river. I've never fished salmon like this before, but I'd like to."

"Cast your line."

Will drew the rod to his side, and flicked the line far out over the water, watching the graceful arc it made, line brilliant in the sun. "Now I wait," Will said, holding the rod before him. He could hear the birds calling to each other over the rush of the river, which sounded so much like his own blood in his ears.

"Good," Hannibal said from right next to him, placing a hand on his shoulder.

Will turned to him in surprise. "You're here."

"Am I?" Hannibal asked, looking down at himself. He was wearing jeans under his rubber waders and a worn grey shirt. Will laughed. Hannibal frowned. "And what vestments has your imagination bestowed upon me?"

Will grinned. "You're wearing jeans and a t-shirt."

"Well, I would hardly wear a three-piece suit to go fishing," Hannibal scoffed.

"You look good," Will said. "The shirts a little tight on you, it's one of mine."

Hannibal looked down at himself. "Very well," he said, with a languid shrug. "When in Rome."

Will chuckled, and turned his attention back to the river. "This is nice," he said. "I wonder if you'll let me do this while we're awake. I could teach you how."

"Teach me," Abigail said from his other side, smiling brightly.

Will gasped softly, and gave her a huge smile. "Abigail's here."

Hannibal gave her a nod. "I can see that."

"Can you?" Will asked.

Hannibal squeezed his shoulder. "Of course. I'm here with you."

Will stared between his two companions, warm affection swelling in his chest. "Am I even still awake?" he asked, not particularly caring what the answer was.

"You are in a hypnagogic state," Hannibal answered, taking a half step behind Will and leaning close. "Soon you will fall unconscious."

"Will both of you stay with me?" Will asks. "I'd like to have a pleasant dream, for once."

Abigail laced her arm through his and squeezed close. He could smell her shampoo as she smiled up at him shyly. "I'll stay," she said. "This is way better than the hospital. Can we go for real sometime?"

Laughter bubbled up from his chest. "I'll talk to Doctor Bloom and see what I can do."

Hannibal squeezed his shoulder. "Look out at the water," he instructed. "How the sunlight is flashing across the surface. It's bright and rhythmic. You can feel the sound of rushing water throughout your whole body."

Will nodded. It felt like he was becoming the river, and couldn't separate his legs from the current. This was perfect, wading in the clear river with Hannibal and Abigail at his side, almost as if they were family. His chest ached, loss and longing and happiness all at once.

"You've caught something on your line," Hannibal said with a smile. "Can you feel it?"

The line went taught in the rod. "I can, I can feel it." He placed his hand on the reel, and began to pull it in.

"Reel it in," Hannibal said, and suddenly the sun was setting, the light red on the water. "You have no trouble reeling it in. It wants to be caught by you."

"It's still struggling a bit," Will said. "Abigail, can you take the net?"

"Got it," Abigail said, with a fishing net in hand.

"It suits you," Will said to her with a smile. "Alright, be ready for when it emerges from the water." He reeled in the fly line to the familiar clicking rhythm. The water rippled, red and glinting like a mosaic, and Will reeled, and Abigail readied the net, and Hannibal whispered in his ear --

Will hauled up the rod --

The surface broke --

And *it emerged*.

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Hannibal leaned over Will, holding a handheld strobe light that flashed rapidly. Will was twitching under the violent light, eyes convulsing under fluttering closed lids. With his free hand, Hannibal lifted Will's eyelids. The man was deeply unaware of his surroundings, but not quite unconscious. During the hypnagogic guided meditation, Hannibal had induced the fit of seizures currently wracking Will’s body. His whole body shuddered with small spasms, a cold sweat breaking on his pale face. "Very good, Will," Hannibal murmured affectionately. "You have completely surrendered.”

Half-formed words rolled from Will's mouth, garbled and incomprehensible. His lips were wet with spit. Hannibal leaned down and kissed his trembling mouth, smoothing his hand through the man's

dark curls. The taste of him was poison to Hannibal's self-control, warm and sweet and *his*. Hannibal pressed his tongue deep in Will's mouth, drinking his broken moans, licking his palette and the sharp edges of his teeth. Hannibal observed his own arousal pulsing through him, accepted it, and placed it neatly aside. "Beautiful," Hannibal said against his mouth.

He withdrew, admiring the way the flashing light broke Will's face into shards, such beautiful and delicately violent tremors. His features were exquisite, the hair of Caravaggio's cupid, a face to rival Da Vinci's angels, and a body in the soft throws of pain like Giordano's rebellious angels falling into hell. Hannibal lifted his silk shirt and traced the contours of Will's chest, the too-prominent ribs expanding and contracting rapidly, the sensual curve of his hip, skin stretched tight over bone. Will was perfect. How Hannibal wanted to paint his body as the Wound Man, revealing Will's inner turmoil in a bouquet of instruments impaled in his flesh.

There was so much Hannibal wanted to do to him, could do to him, and some of it he might even get away with while Will was in this state. But Hannibal was not a selfish man. He wanted what was best for Will, to release the self-imposed shackles with which Will daily tortured himself. It would take time, and a careful, steady hand. Psychic driving could only be successful if the patient was utterly unaware of what was happening. Will was responsive to Hannibal’s gentle nudges, but he was also dangerously intelligent. Even under the sway of hypnosis, Hannibal had no doubt that Will could resist intrusive thoughts. Therefore, he must lure out the natural impulses growing restless in Will’s mind. Hannibal had no doubt that the creature he would bring to the surface would be brilliant.

Hannibal thumbed Will’s lower lip. “You hear my voice as your own,” Hannibal said. “Echoing from the depths of your mind. I am here with you. Look at me, Will.”

Chapter End Notes

don't forget what Hannibal is, dear readers.

don't worry, there will be smut and murder in the next chapter. thanks for reading! tumblr

Blood Play

Chapter Summary

Will stripped it all away. He stood before the woman, alive and bound in the chair. "Unlike the Maestro, I build my instrument while she is alive," Will said in the chamber of his mind. "It's important that she suffer."

o o o o o o o o o o

The Maestro's serenade is returned. Hannibal cuts Will open.

Chapter Notes

as promised: more murder and sex. say hi on tumblr

cw: blood play!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will awoke to the sound of his phone ringing. He sat up, rubbing his eyes. The bedroom was dark, and Hannibal was sleeping quietly next to him. Will grabbed the phone -- it was Jack. It was also 5 in the morning.

"Jack," Will answered. Hannibal stirred beside him.

"I need you to come to a scene," Jack said tightly. "It was just called in."

Will swung his legs over the side of the bed as Jack spoke. Will was strangely cold. He had been sweating in his sleep again, and his pajamas stuck to his skin. "It's at the Symphony Hall," Jack said.

"What?" Will frowned in confusion.

"I'm driving there right now," Jack explained. "It's like the Maestro struck again."

"The Maestro is dead," Will said.

"Maybe the Maestro wasn't Tobias, or maybe he was working with a partner, I don't know Will. That's why I need you there."

Hannibal sat up in bed, blinking sleepily at Will. He looked over his shoulder and gave the man a feeble smile. "All right, Jack. I'll be there as soon as I can." Will hung up and sighed deeply. "I have

to go," he said to Hannibal.

"I understand," Hannibal said, voice groggy with sleep. "Should I make you coffee?"

"No, no, go back to sleep." Will crawled over to him and kissed him. "You look tired."

Hannibal thumbed Will's cheek. "Call me when you're done."

Will nodded. "Sure."

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Before he drove over, Will texted Freddie Lounds.

Will: Scene at the Symphony Hall.

He didn't bother to look at her response when his phone buzzed a mere minute later.

Will entered the Symphony Hall with a profound sense of déjà vu, because he had seen this before, just two weeks prior. But while it was similar to Budge's victim, it was also vastly different. Even from the other side of the hall, Will could tell that this wasn't the same Maestro. He barely registered the growing throng of CSIs and police as he made his way down the aisle between concert seats.

The victim's hair was a striking red, and as he approached the body, he had to rub his eyes to make sure he was seeing clearly. The victim looked eerily similar to Freddie Lounds: a petite woman with tight red curls. But Freddie had just texted him, hadn't she? Will fumbled for his phone, and read the text she had sent:

F L: See you soon. Don't forget: an eye for an eye.

Frowning, he looked back to the victim, dread growing cold inside him. He couldn't see her face from here, not with the cello neck forced down her throat. His heart hammered in his chest. "Jack," Will called over his shoulder. "Please tell me this isn't Freddie Lounds."

"So you noticed the resemblance too," Jack said, joining Will. "It's not her."

Will breathed a sigh of relief. Jack gave him a searching look, and Will headed for the steps that would take him on stage.

"Clear the room!" Jack bellowed.

The smell of blood and a fresh corpse assaulted Will's senses as he took the stage. The body was positioned very similarly to the Maestro's victim: she was seated on an orchestra chair, her head thrown back, and had been made into a human cello. But that wasn't all he killer had done to her. Her arms were held upright by thin, clear wire that extended to a rig above. She was posed with a bow in her hand as if she was playing herself, and the strings on the bow were made of her own

hair. Will's stomach flipped over. Red hair, pulled tight. The meat of her legs had been stripped away, and her tibia and fibula bones removed. They hung around her like a morbid wind-chime.

Will stepped closer. Why did she look like Freddie Lounds? That couldn't be a coincidence, it couldn't be; she was even wearing the same shade of lipstick as Freddie. Will took a deep, shuddering breath. He didn't want to look at this, but it was inevitable. He didn't even have to try to see the design.

Will stood before the tableau and removed his glasses. He closed his eyes.

The metronome swung.

Will stripped it all away. He stood before the woman, alive and bound in the chair. "Unlike the Maestro, I build my instrument while she is alive," Will said in the chamber of his mind. "It's important that she suffer."

Will stared at the woman struggling against her plastic tie restraints and screaming against the cloth gag. He approached her, metal tools in hand. "I remove the gag and take out her tongue." He pinched her tongue in pliers and cut deep, the sound of her screams ringing in his ears. Her mouth quickly filled with blood, and she began to choke on it. Will broke her jaw open. "I force the cello neck down her throat while she's still alive." Will struggled to shove it down her trachea, panting. "I am not making an instrument, I am mocking the musician. I cut away the skin to expose her vocal chords, not to play them, but to show how far I can force the neck."

The body convulsed. "I don't want her to die yet," Will said, making an incision between ribs. "So I hook up a respirator, forcing oxygen into her lungs. While she's still alive, I remove her eyes."

Will pierced the connective nerves of the eyeball with hooks, and hung it on fishing line from the rig. "I arrange her limbs. She is playing herself. I am making a mockery of the Maestro's work. His performance did not impress me. I am the killer Budge was serenading -- and I reject his song."

Will stripped the flesh from the legs, laying out the muscles like petals of a flower. "At some point while I work, she goes into cardiac arrest. She has stopped suffering at this point, so there is no need to force her to remain alive. I remove the respirator. Then I take her bones and hang them alongside her eyes."

Will looked at his creation with smug satisfaction, then frowned. "If I had more time, I would carve her bones into wind flutes. But there is no wind here anyway. A pity."

Will blinked at the corpse. At some point, he had come back to the present, but it wasn't a clear return to himself. He looked around the music hall nervously, half expecting to see Garret Jacob Hobbs. No ghosts, just Jack at the side door, speaking to someone on the other side. Will slipped his phone out of his pocket and held it up to his chest, turning on the camera. He grinned -- *maybe this will scare you off*. Will took a picture of the corpse. *I can be patient, Freddie. You have no idea what I'm capable of.*

Will nearly dropped his phone. He clutched his chest -- it felt like his heart had fallen through the floor. No, no, no! He didn't do this! He turned away from the body with a hand over his mouth. Why did she look like Freddie Lounds?

Because you wanted to kill her.

No, that didn't make sense. Whoever did this was responding to Tobias Budge, mocking his serenade. And no one knew that he had thought about killing Freddie Lounds except himself and Hannibal, and they had both been asleep while this woman died.

That's a convenient alibi.

"Will?" Jack walked onto the stage. "Are you alright?"

Will looked at him with wide eyes. "Yeah, yeah," he managed to say. "Just... There's something I don't understand." He described the killer to Jack, going through his process and motivations.

"So we're looking for the killer Budge admired," Jack said. "Why would he put on a show if Budge is already dead?"

"Maybe that's not his audience." Will glanced over the body. "He would have rejected Budge this way if he was still alive, probably would have killed Budge like this. But..." Will looked at Jack. "This performance is for us."

"Catch me if you can?" Jack inquired.

"This killer believes himself to be far superior than Tobias Budge," Will explained. "We may have discovered Budge, but we won't catch this killer. He's definitely killed before, but by imitating the Maestro, he's able to hide in plain sight. He hasn't killed like this before." Will gasped, growing excited. "That's why he killed a surrogate of Freddie Lounds! He knows that I'm in his audience, he wants me to see his work." Will gestured wildly at the tableau. "Her eyes are removed and displayed because she saw me, and the killer saw me through Tattle Crime."

"I don't know, Will," Jack said with a deep frown. "That seems like a stretch."

"It can't be a coincidence," Will said. "She's wearing the same lipstick as Freddie. The victim probably isn't related to music at all; she was chosen because of her appearance."

"Why not kill the real Freddie Lounds?"

Will thought that over. "I'm not sure. He wants her to continue to write, maybe."

"Well, I don't want Freddie Lounds anywhere near this," Jack said frustratedly. "We're going to keep this one under wraps."

Will felt a pang of guilt and his phone felt heavy in his hands. At least when Freddie Lounds published the gruesome picture he just took, Jack would probably forget all about Will's interview. He hadn't sent the picture yet -- maybe he shouldn't, maybe he should just come clean to Jack now and save the unit from the public backlash. Jack would hound every officer at the scene to try to figure out who had sent the picture, and they didn't deserve that.

"Jack --" Will started to say, the other man looking at him expectantly; but the words caught in his throat. Will turned suddenly back to the victim, eyes narrowed as he scanned the body parts

hanging like a mobile: bones and two eyeballs. "Jack. We need to find the tongue. I think he took it."

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Will stepped outside the music hall to the winter morning, ignoring the throng of reporters as he stalked to his car. It was cold and grey, light snow caught in flurries that nipped at his heels as he walked. He had thrown on some of the clothes Hannibal had bought him, and the expensive blue-grey sweater kept him warm even under his old winter coat. He called Hannibal.

"Hello, Will," the Doctor said, sounding far more awake than he had that morning.

"Hey, I just got out."

"Was it the Marionette Murderer?"

Will paused. "No, or if it was this is vastly different from her other kills. I don't... I'm not quite sure what this is." He groaned. "It's the killer Budge was serenading."

"How are you?" Hannibal asked.

Will leaned against his car. "Frustrated, mildly disassociating," he answered. "I've got to go to the lab and sort out my thoughts."

"Come back after you're done."

"The dogs --"

"I'll go take care of them," Hannibal said.

"You don't have to do that."

"I am perfectly aware," Hannibal replied with a hint of amusement.

Will chuckled. "Right, thank you. I'll see you later."

"Goodbye, Will."

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Hannibal left Freddie Lounds' apartment as easily as he had entered it.

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The rest of the day passed in a haze. Will felt like he was standing in place on the stage, and the set around him was shifting, the examination tables of the FBI lab sliding into place. Katz, Zeller, and Price were opening up the Freddie look-alike, carefully retracting the cello neck and untying the fishing lines. Zeller cut into her torso. Will was leaning against the wall, reading *ii*'s emails on his phone.

"No tongue in the stomach," Zeller said, scooping the stomach's contents into an evidence bag.

"He took it," Will said numbly.

"A trophy?" Beverly asked sharply. "Is this the Ripper?" Everyone stared at her, except Will, who kept scrolling through his phone. "What?" she snapped. "We're all thinking it."

"The Ripper hasn't killed in two years," Price said. "Although it is elaborate and brutal enough to be him."

Will shook his head. "The timeline doesn't make sense. Since the Ripper's been dormant, Budge wouldn't have been able to make contact with him, ergo, wouldn't serenade him."

"Ok, we're assuming that this killer is the one who Budge serenaded, right?" Beverly said, crossing her arms with a frown. "Even if it's not the Ripper or another known killer, how exactly did Budge find this person?"

"Maybe it's a lost-connections thing," Zeller said. "'I saw your eyes in the crowd and knew that you were also a psycho serial killer.' Except instead of craigslist, he posted his human cello."

Beverly rolled her eyes. "Yeah, and maybe all the Maryland serial killers have an annual conference."

"There are certainly enough of them," Will muttered.

"Tobias Budge was a solitary man," Beverly said. "But he was looking for a partner in crime. So who cold he have made a connection with?"

"Art patrons, musicians, Baltimore's elite," Will said.

"Music students?" Price threw out.

"The student surpasses the master." Zeller suggested.

Will shook his head. "You don't serenade your student. Maybe a music teacher."

"Ok, hold the phone." Zeller pointed dramatically at the corpse. "She was basically made into a puppet. What if this is the Marionette Murderer?"

Beverly shook her head. "The method of killing is too different."

"But here me out: the Marionette Murderer is a currently active killer in the area, and Budge would have definitely known about her kills. They're both theatrical, they both used wires to kill. And it's possible for killers to change their methods."

Everyone looked at Will. He had a headache. He wanted to get away from this place, go grab Abigail from the hospital and take her to the river in Wolf Trap. But it was winter, and a killer had somehow reached into his mind and pulled out his fantasies. He couldn't see it clearly; if he just extracted himself the picture he was sure he would be able to understand it: who Budge had serenaded and how he had found them, why the victim looked like Freddie Lounds. "She wouldn't have taken the tongue," Will finally said. "She doesn't take trophies." His head was pounding.

"So we're back to the Ripper," Price said with a heavy sigh. "Who wants to tell Jack?"

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Hannibal pulled Will into a tight embrace when he arrived at the front door that evening. Will wound his arms around the other man's waist, pressing his face to his shoulder and breathing deep the comforting smells of cologne and cooking herbs. "Welcome back," Hannibal said gently, stroking the fuzz at the back of his neck.

Will sighed, and leaned back in Hannibal's arms to look at him. A few rogue hairs had strayed from place and Will smoothed them back. "How are you?" Will asked.

Hannibal smiled, just a bare curve of his mouth, his eyes soft. "I am quite well, as are your dogs."

"Thanks again." Will rested his hand on Hannibal's neck, frowning slightly. "I feel like I haven't asked you that in ages. I suppose I've been terribly rude."

Hannibal kissed his cheek. "Do not fret, Will; I have a soft spot for you and your unspeakable rudeness."

Will laughed, and pressed a soft kiss to Hannibal's lips. "Am I your exception?" he asked.

"For every rule," Hannibal muttered.

"Good." Will stepped back and removed his coat, which Hannibal took from him. "Because you're my exception, too. Ok, I'm going to take a quick shower, and then I'm going to enlist your help in putting my brain back together."

"Wear something nice for me," Hannibal said, eyes gleaming.

Will blushed. "Sure, sure."

Will rinsed off in the shower, loosing himself momentarily in the rush of water. Maybe tonight he would wade into the river again with Abigail and Hannibal. Something tugged at the back of his mind like a warning -- *you can't have that*, the thought snapped into his mind, *a monster like you*

doesn't deserve them. Will turned the water cold until he was forced back into his shivering body.

He stood in the closet and tried to pick out an outfit that would please Hannibal. It was good to have a task to focus on. Will entertained the options of scandalizing Hannibal somehow, either wearing clashing patterns or just wearing briefs and his robe -- and Hannibal's sock garters, definitely. Maybe next time. Will was too tired now, and he did want to look good for the other man. Let Hannibal lead him out of muddy waters; Will was prepared to follow.

Will found three suits sized for him, and an assortment of dress shirts, a modest collection compared to Hannibal's own. Will selected a two piece suit in burgundy. The jacket was single breasted with two buttons, and the fabric shimmered in the light. He paired it with an off-white shirt and a matching dark red tie with a tight honeycomb pattern. He dressed in front of the full length mirror. The suit fit him exceptionally well, the pants much tighter than he was used to wearing, but that was Hannibal's preference. He looked slim and fit, his skin pale against the dark red suit. His reflection looked far more put together than he felt, except for his hair, which refused to be tamed. Even fresh out of the shower, the curls were springing out in every direction.

Will took off his glasses, and rested them on the bedside table.

Hannibal looked up when he heard Will approach the kitchen in black dress shoes, and when he saw him in the doorway, he paused what he was doing at the stove. Hannibal's eyes widened. Will blushed under his possessive gaze, warmth crawling through his body. He cleared his throat with a fist held politely over his mouth. "How do I look?" he asked.

The muscles of Hannibal's throat worked as he stared at Will, and pausing longer than usual before answering. "You look supremely handsome," Hannibal said, a bit breathless. It made Will feel powerful, attractive and poised instead of on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Hannibal regained some of his composure. "Tonight we will dine upon *csángó gulyás*, a Hungarian goulash with beef cheek, and a *caponata* for the antipasta. Would you pour the wine?"

There was a crock pot on the stove next to a small pot of rice, and when Hannibal lifted the lid to check the progress of the goulash Will smelled tender flesh and paprika. Hannibal was in his usual cooking attire: suit jacket hanging on the chair in the corner of the kitchen, brown apron over the vest, and his sleeves rolled up to the elbow. It was bizarre to be more formally dressed than Hannibal, though when the meal was ready the apron would return to its hook, sleeves would be smoothed into place and the suit jacket donned. The wine was already open to breathe, so Will fetched two glasses and poured for them.

"Cheek?" Will asked. "I don't know if I've eaten that before."

"It's an underrated cut," Hannibal explained, tapping his own cheek twice. "The cheeks are used vigorously, increasing blood flow and connective tissue. The fat is evenly marbled throughout the meat, so while it's a poor steak, cheek is perfect for slow cooking. The result is a succulent meat that falls apart at the first touch."

Will handed Hannibal his glass of wine. The man turned towards him, scenting the red with his eyes on Will. Will lowered his eyes to his own glass and inhaled the sharp, earthy smell. He brought the glass to his lips and tried to savor the taste like Hannibal did, taking just a sip and holding the wine on his tongue before swallowing. "Thank you, Will," Hannibal said, returning to the counter to chop eggplant.

"It's the least I could do," Will said, sitting on the stool on the opposite side of the counter. He understood now why Hannibal liked to dress so flawlessly. Will had never understood the appeal before, always feeling out of place in nice suits; but now Will felt like he indisputably belonged in this room. He didn't fidget or bite his nails, no shrinking into himself. Instead, he watched Hannibal slice into the yellow flesh of the eggplant, noting with a swell of pride how the other man glanced at him occasionally.

"What did you see today, Will?" Hannibal asked.

Will's words were deliberate and slowly articulated. "I looked out a window and saw my reflection marring the surface of the image beyond." Will twirled the stem of the wine glass. "This kill felt personal to Will Graham in a way that defies reason. It was a... reprise of Tobias Budge's kill. Staged in the Symphony Hall. This was the killer for whom Budge had composed his serenade, but this was a rejection. A mockery of Budge's art."

Hannibal slid the eggplant pieces to the edge of the cutting board and swiftly chopped onions and tomatoes. "I suppose this killer must be disappointed that Budge cannot view his rejection."

Will shrugged. "Maybe. They are probably disappointed that they didn't kill Budge themselves." Hannibal glanced at him, noting the gender-neutral pronoun. "Budge was supposed to be the body of this mock instrument," Will continued, "But you deprived them of that pleasure."

Hannibal smirked. "I will have to apologize when you apprehend them."

"So this killer changed their plans," Will explained. "And instead used a surrogate of Freddie Lounds."

Hannibal paused in his work to consider this new piece of information. "When you say surrogate..."

"Her doppelgänger," Will explained. "It looked just like her. The killer even matched her shade of lipstick."

"Why not find a surrogate for Tobias?" Hannibal asked as he fetched a small pan to toast the pine nuts.

Will took another sip of wine. "That's what has me so confused. Why Freddie Lounds? The reason I keep coming back to is absurd: because *I* wanted to kill her."

Hannibal didn't speak at once. He tossed the pine nuts until they were golden and transferred them into a small bowl. "Ms. Lounds just published your interview."

"Exactly. This kill was for me."

"A serenade for you."

Will grinned bitterly. "Look at how well I kill. How my art is superior."

Hannibal transferred the eggplant to the pan and drizzled more oil. "Who is clamoring for your attention?"

"Beverly thinks it could be the Ripper. But I have no idea how Budge would have found the Ripper." Will shrugged. "If he completes his sounder, we'll know."

"You're also considering the Marionette Murderer," Hannibal observed.

"Very tentatively," Will responded with a nod. "She wouldn't have taken the tongue."

"A trophy," Hannibal said lightly, and then made a considering hum. "Are there other active killers who take surgical trophies?"

"Oh," Will said, a laugh bubbling up from his chest. "Oh, *of course*. It's the Copycat." Will licked his lips, the pieces falling into place. "The same killer who imitated, no, *embellished* the Shrike's work. Gift wrapped for me."

He saw it with perfect clarity: mounting the brown-haired girl on the stag head, antlers piercing flesh, tips gleaming with dark blood. He removed her lungs while she was struggling to breathe. Will took another drink of wine, and nearly choked -- it tasted like blood. "Sorry," Will muttered as he pushed the glass away. "Overactive imagination."

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The taste of blood was still in Will's mouth when they sat down to dinner. The tender meat broke into fine strands beneath his fork, saturated in the hearty goulash, and he assembled a bite with a touch of sour cream to overwhelm the taste of copper. He closed his eyes in appreciation for the flavors. The wine was still blood, and the strands of meat shifted into locks of hair before his eyes, but there were worse obsessive sensory hallucinations. Will's mind was clear, and he did not feel the burning edge of blades against his skin.

"Can I make a request?" Will asked after patting the blood from his lips.

"Of course," Hannibal replied easily.

Will didn't want the words to dissolve or trip in his mouth, so he articulated each with care. "I want you to cut me."

Hannibal's hands, gracefully holding the knife and fork, paused over the dish like a conductor before the up-beat. His eyes found Will's and he smiled genuinely, the features of his face lifting and crinkling the skin around his eyes. "I would enjoy that," he said simply, a slight quiver to his mouth.

Will grinned. "Thought you might. Not exactly a novel experience for you, though."

"Surgery was my occupation," Hannibal said, "And I took pride in my work. Excitement came from the challenges I faced." He took a bite of goulash, never in a hurry to finish his statement. "Cutting you would be an entirely different experience: your anticipation and desire, the knowledge that I was marking you in a way no one else has, the... taste of you."

Will flushed, shifting in his seat. "Is it not, uh, sanitary…?" He swallowed.

"The human mouth is filled with bacteria that, while harmless in the mouth, could cause infections," Hannibal replied. "Saliva also contains tissue factor that aids in clotting. I will of course tend to the wounds in case there is an infection. Would you like me to cut you a new mouth to kiss?"

Will laughed automatically and looked away, biting his lip. "Oh god, you can't say things like that!"

"My apologies," Hannibal said, though he wasn't sorry at all.

"It's a penetration," Will said. "It's bringing the fantasies to life."

"The skin is the barrier between inside and outside, what holds us apart from the world." Hannibal smirked. "Sex, wounds, even eating reminds us of our own permeable mortality. I wonder: when I cut into your skin, will it feel like you are dying, or that you are finally alive?"

Will swirled the wine, dark as blood and trailing viscous lines down the inside of the glass, and he thought about crushing the glass in his fist, and how Hannibal would come to his side to pick out the glass from his bleeding hand, licking the wounds and sucking his bloody fingers in his mouth. "I suppose we'll find out," he said.

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In the bedroom Hannibal stripped Will out of his suit with reverence for the finely tailored garment and the lean body beneath. Will shivered at every touch to his bare skin, his mind transforming the tips of Hannibal's fingers into razor blades that drew graceful, bloody arcs across his skin. Hannibal removed his own clothes as well, accepting some assistance from Will, and then pressed their bodies together, the skin contact a balm to Will's phantom wounds. "How do you always know what to do?" Will asked breathlessly, holding Hannibal close.

The other man chuckled. "I pay attention, dear Will."

Will hung up their suits while Hannibal arranged his supplies: black rope, lube, two scalpels, antiseptic, latex gloves, cotton swabs, and gauze. He set black towels on the floor before the mirror, and summoned Will. The ropes against his flesh calmed his anxious mind. The deft movements of Hannibal's hands, the secure pressure against his skin, and having the movements of his body taken away from him made Will feel safe and controlled. Hannibal bade him hold his elbows behind his back to restrain the forearms together. He then wrapped the rope around Will's shoulders, above and then below his pectorals. He tied the rope around the crossed lines above Will's spine, creating a column from his arms to a spot between his shoulder blades. The result was a thick handle above his spine, and Hannibal grabbed it in hand and shook Will once. Will gasped at the ease with which the other man handled his body.

Hannibal guided Will to kneel on the towels and wrapped his legs. The ties weren't functional, as his thighs and calves weren't tied together, but the way his thighs were squeezed felt ridiculously good. He was kneeling in front of the mirror, and the sight of him wrapped and tied, naked, skin slightly flushed, with Hannibal behind him checking the rope, sent shocks of arousal through him.

He was mesmerized. The dim light from the other side of the room made their bodies soft with shadow, glowing at the edges. Hannibal met his gaze and his eyes were, impossibly, the color of blood and hunger.

"Do you like what you see?" Hannibal murmured, smoothing Will's hair aside to kiss his neck. He smoothed a broad hand down Will's stomach, and his cock twitched. Hannibal sucked at his shoulder, scrutinizing him in the mirror.

"Oh god, yes," Will whispered, eyes so dilated only a sliver of blue remained. "It's already -- don't tease me."

"Why should I be merciful?" Hannibal growled into his skin, sucking his way up Will's neck and lapping at his ear.

"Oh," Will said softly, tilting his head. Hannibal pressed flush against his back and arms, curling around Will to kiss his jaw. "Please, Hannibal--"

Hannibal sat on his heels, and spread Will's legs wide so he could sit back on his lap. Hannibal put on the latex gloves. He reached for the tincture of iodine and alcohol, and tilted the bottle onto the cotton swab. With the mirror as his guide, Hannibal swabbed two inch stripes on Will's pectorals, two above the nipple and one below, and a stripe down his sternum. The cold antiseptic had Will shivering with anticipation. Hannibal took the scalpel in hand, and Will's eyes locked on the small blade in the mirror. His breathing grew sharp and ragged. Hannibal telegraphed his movements so Will could clearly see the slow positioning of the knife over his chest, hovering some inches above the skin. The gleam of metal, the taste of metal in his mouth, flesh parting cleanly -- Will slumped forward, and Hannibal held him in place by the column of rope.

"Breathe, Will," Hannibal instructed. Will whined, brows knit. He exhaled slowly and tried to breathe evenly, his shoulders starting to shake. Hannibal pointed the blade away from Will and kissed his shoulder, slow and gentle, breathing deep against him so that Will's breathing would match his own.

"I -- can't," Will gasped. His heart was hammering and his insides felt all twisted up. Nevertheless he tried to calm down, focusing on the rise and fall of Hannibal's chest against him.

"Good," Hannibal murmured. "I want you to look at yourself in the mirror while I cut you."

Will swallowed, and nodded. He stared at their reflection, and Hannibal rested the tip of the scalpel over his heart. "The blade is so sharp that I needn't put any pressure," Hannibal said in a low voice. He gracefully dragged the scalpel across Will's skin in a horizontal line.

Will hissed. If it weren't for the alcohol it probably wouldn't have stung at all. Blood welled up immediately, and Hannibal drew the blade away, watching the dark liquid fill the wound and seep down Will's chest, pooling around his nipple. Will gasped, and with a gloved hand Hannibal peeled up the lip of the wound. More blood pooled to the surface. "Hurts," Will hissed, squirming back against Hannibal.

"Describe it to me." Hannibal smeared the blood across Will's chest, circling his nipple.

Will titled his head back, looking down his nose to watch them in the mirror. "It feels -- massive,

or, no, like all I am is this inch of cut skin. Why is it... bleeding so much?"

"The alcohol," Hannibal responded, tweaking his bloody nipple. "I'm going to cut you again."

"Please," Will gasped.

Hannibal made another incision above the first, even and exactly the same length. Blood spilled forth with another painful sting, pooling around the first cut. He sucked at Will's ear, catching the lobe between sharp teeth and tugging with a growl. Will jerked forward, but the scalpel was safely pointed away from Will's skin and held firmly. Hannibal rocked against him slowly, his hard length pressed against the curve of his ass. Hannibal gently stretched and squeezed the wounds, drawing more blood. The edges of Will's vision shuddered, and he heard the creak of twisting antlers and bones about to break. Hannibal cut a third line below Will's nipple, and Will moaned, eyes rolling back.

Hannibal placed gentle kisses along Will's shoulder, teeth grazing. He placed the scalpel down, and lifted his bloody, gloved hand to Will's mouth, tracing his lips. Will darted out his tongue and tasted his own blood, so much more vivid than in his imagination. He sucked at the proffered fingers, the latex drying out the taste. He lapped at the gloves anyway. His arms jerked as he thought to smear his own bare hands in his blood and lift them to Hannibal's lips. Hannibal removed his fingers, and replaced the glove with a fresh one. The blood on Will's chest was starting to get sticky. "What do you think of your taste?" Hannibal asked.

"Reminds me of getting punched," Will replied. "And the time I got my face shoved into a drinking fountain and nearly choked on a tooth."

"I'm going to cut you deeper," Hannibal said.

"Yeah," Will managed to say. "Yes, yes."

Hannibal rested the scalpel on his right pectoral. Will held his breath, glancing down at himself. Very slowly, Hannibal cut into him, and he saw the moment the blade sunk into flesh before the blood welled up and obscured what lay inside. "Aahh, ahh--" Will winced against the pain, sucking in his breath. His eyes blurred. "God, that --"

Hannibal removed the blade, and set it down. He then squeezed the wound and Will cried out. If it wasn't for Hannibal's grip on his rope, he probably would have gone face-first into the towel. Hannibal prodded the wound with his fingertip, grinding up against Will as he pulled him back into his lap. And then, with a surge of deep pain, Hannibal wiggled the tip of his pinkie into the wound. For a moment, Will's vision went white. "Hah-- Hannibal!" he exclaimed. "You can't--"

Hannibal massaged the edge of the cut with his little finger, lifting the edges. "There will be bruising," Hannibal said in a heavy voice. "I am making a place for myself inside of you." He let go of the rope and wrapped his arm around Will, using his other hand to open the wound wide. He dipped his finger in again. It wasn't deep enough to take more than part of the pad of his little finger, but to Will it felt enormous. The pain rolled through him in waves, until he was weak and shaking.

Hannibal rotated Will on his lap so he could bend down and lick the blood-slick skin. He moaned hungrily, blood-stained hands gripping Will tight. The skin around the wound felt hot and aching, bizarrely similar to the pain of his erection. Hannibal licked up to the site of the wound and kissed

the swollen edges. His breath was so hot. Will was falling back against him, overwhelmed, panting hard, and as Hannibal flicked out his tongue against the cut Will felt his whole body throb. “God, it’s -- you can’t,” Will said weakly. Hannibal drew the flat of his tongue along the length of the wound, then waited for the blood to pool before licking it again. Will heard him swallow, and cursed. “Fuck, Hannibal, that’s--” But he couldn’t get a coherent statement out; Hannibal probed his tongue into the wound, Will’s vision came in and out of focus, and then Hannibal’s whole mouth was around the cut and he was sucking.

A wave of nausea and arousal coursed through Will, and his vision was going at the edges. “Too much!” he gasped. “Gonna… faint…”

Hannibal removed his mouth with a sick wet noise. “I apologize, Will,” he said, voice thick with arousal. “Your taste is temptation itself.” He lay Will back on the floor and lifted his legs up on his thighs.

“I’m alright,” Will said after a moment of just breathing. “I can keep going. It was just too intense.”

Hannibal stroked his thighs. Will could see his pulse throb rapidly in his neck. “Are you okay?” Will asked. He couldn’t even name the small expression he felt hidden in Hannibal’s tender caress that made him ask. But then Hannibal paused before responding, emotions tucked away like folding an ink-stained paper over, and over, and over. Hannibal frowned in puzzlement.

“It was intense for me as well,” Hannibal responded at last, not looking at Will.

“Do I taste like I’m alive?” Will asked. “Or like I’m dying?”

Hannibal looked at him sharply, nostrils flaring, and Will recognized finally what emotion Hannibal forced away: loss. Frighteningly fast, Hannibal crawled over Will and kissed him over and over again, sucking at his mouth, and Will’s blood smeared between them, mingling with their saliva. Will let him kiss him until he was sated, even though his arms were aching against his back. “Will,” Hannibal breathed. “Will, Will, Will.”

“I’m here, I’m here.”

Hannibal took a breath and seemed to come back to himself. “So you are,” he replied with a small smile. Hannibal lifted Will up again, resuming their positions before the mirror. He removed his gloves and held Will close, kissing the back of his neck. Will shifted back against him until he was fully seated on his lap. Hannibal stroked his hands up and down Will’s sides, moving from just beneath his chest all the way down his thighs, and then took him in hand, stroking his cock slowly. Will rocked up into his hand and then back into his lap. It was hard to look at them in the mirror, it was too overwhelming -- his blood smeared chest, spread legs, rope pressed against skin, and Hannibal, hungry and disheveled and looking half mad with the need to possess Will, to peel back his skin and sink inside of him fully. Hannibal adjusted so his cock was flush in the cleft of Will’s ass and began to rock with him. They were both up on their knees, and Will nearly tipped forward. Hannibal grabbed the handle of rope with his free hand, keeping Will balanced as they thrust slowly forward and back.

“Don't wanna come yet,” Will panted, because he was already excruciatingly hard and leaking pre-cum, which Hannibal used to slick the glide of his hand. Hannibal gripped him at the base, and then eased his hand off.

“What do you want?” Hannibal asked, words muffled against Will’s neck.

Will met his eyes in the mirror. “I want you inside me,” he said. He knew Hannibal wanted it too, and squirmed back against him. Hannibal hissed and grabbed the meat of Will’s ass, massaging it hard for a moment before grabbing the jar of lube. Will balanced himself on Hannibal’s thighs as the other man slicked up his fingers. He could barely keep his head up. The blood was drying on his skin but the cuts still stung, and the one on the right was already bruising. He felt wet fingers against his hole and made a desperate, inhuman sound. Hannibal swirled the pads of his fingers around the rim, holding Will in place by the rope, and Will pushed back against his hand and then slumped forward, his legs shaking violently. Hannibal sunk into him bit by bit, whispering words of praise as Will stretched easily around his finger, slick and strong and working back against him impatiently until he was knuckle deep. Hannibal teased a second finger inside and stretched the rim with small circular motions.

Will let out a deep groan of impatience. “I'm ready,” he gasped. “Please.”

Hannibal brought his fingers back until just the tips were inside, and then thrust in hard. Will winced, feeling a slight burn. “I will decide when you are ready,” Hannibal said, removing his fingers just as quickly. “You will take what I give you.”

Will dropped his head on his chest. He needed this, he needed Hannibal -- now. For a moment he thought Hannibal would stop touching him and wait for Will to beg (no, Will was already ready to beg, Hannibal would just wait until it suited him) -- but he glanced up at the mirror and saw Hannibal licking his own fingers with the rapturous expression he wore when savoring a particularly fine meal. Will felt like his heart had stopped. “Oh, *god*…”

Hannibal smirked at him in the mirror, and shoved him forward. Will fell with his face pressed against the towel, hips up in the air, and then Hannibal bit him hard on the ass. Pain shocked through him, at first cold and unwanted and then a warm, tender ache. Hannibal was teething at him, mouthing his way closer -- Will felt a flush of shame and screwed up his eyes tight as Hannibal licked his hole. Despite having slept with men before, no one had ever done this to him; it was repulsive, and far too intimate. His mind tried to shut it out. Hannibal massaged his thighs as he lapped at the wet ring of muscle, probing his tongue inside even as Will tried to push him out. Will was about to protest -- this was just too embarrassing -- when Hannibal let out a low, hungry moan, and Will felt it against his sensitive skin.

The fact that Hannibal so obviously enjoyed this made Will tense with pleasure. The arousal was pooling in his groin, molten gold thick and vibrant. “You… like that,” Will gasped.

Hannibal moaned in response, digging his fingers into the meat of Will’s ass. Will still felt hot with shame, but agreed with himself to take what Hannibal offered. Hannibal licked, and sucked, and probed, and Will felt wetness trickle down his thigh. The sounds were obscene, he felt obscene, open in a way that should be lethal; and at some point he gave in, sopping wet and stretched by Hannibal’s tongue and drooling into the towel.

Hannibal dragged him up to his knees again. Will couldn't focus, had no idea how much time had passed, only vaguely aware of Hannibal slicking up his cock. A monstrous form shuddered in the mirror, sharp and undulating. Will had to squint to parse what he was seeing: him, kneeling bloody and debauched, and Hannibal surging behind him with muscular grace, one hand on the rope handle, the other guiding his cock head against Will’s hole. They looked at each other in the mirror, Will’s eyes unfocused, Hannibal’s unrelenting. “Yes,” Will tried to say, but it came out broken.

Hannibal pushed inside, and Will opened smooth and tight around him. It was slow, too slow, the river rushing around them. Will's sensations were split -- on one screen, the overwhelming feeling of Hannibal breaching him; on another, the two monstrous forms rising up out of the tar, conjoined and slick with blood. Hannibal thrust into him slowly, but hard enough to tip Will's body forward. If Hannibal didn't have a grip on his harness he would surely fall over. The apex of every thrust was the pinnacle of a roller coaster before the fall, and then Hannibal slid back, and then pulled Will by the rope to meet another thrust. Will was delirious with it. Sliding up and nearly off Hannibal's cock, being tugged back onto it, nearly bouncing back off, but all of it so slow and sensuous. Will saw Hannibal bite his lip. Shudder. Saw his hair stick to his forehead with sweat. Heard him moan with every flick of his hips. Will couldn't recognize himself in the mirror, so completely entrapped in the sensations and the sight of Hannibal.

Hannibal quickened his pace, and Will had to fight to keep his thighs and hips stable enough for Hannibal to control him like this. In the mirror Will could see Hannibal looking down at the place they were conjoined, and Will could imagine it perfectly: how his tight rim clung to Hannibal when he pulled back, and curled inward on the thrust. Hannibal pressed a thumb there to feel and Will felt a new trickle of pre-come leak down him. "Hannibal," Will gasped, and the other man met his gaze, slightly astonished at what he saw. Hannibal kissed Will's neck desperately, like he was something precious he thought he had lost, pain and relief both writ on his face. He pulled back on the rope and snapped his hips forward sharply, somehow driving deeper, and Will cried out. "Yes, more, harder --"

Hannibal did it again, and again, thrusting into Will relentlessly, yanking him back on his cock and fucking him so hard he nearly fell off each time. Hannibal seated himself deep in Will and tilted his torso back so they were nearly flush, a hand snaking up his bloody chest to tweak a nipple. From this extended angle Will could nearly see the place where Hannibal fucked into him, saw the wet dark base of his cock sliding in and out. Hannibal moaned into his neck, a pained noise louder than Will had heard before, and he tilted his head to desperately reach for Hannibal's mouth. They kissed sloppily, mouthes barely able to meet.

Will's legs finally gave out and he slumped against Hannibal, gasping for air. He felt so good inside him, burning and solid. Will was so close, it was like he was dying. "M'gonna…" He couldn't even speak. Hannibal rolled his hips slowly. "No," Will protested. "Hard, please."

Hannibal complied. He laid Will down on his stomach, spreading his legs wider, and thrust into him without reserve. Will sobbed against the towel, and the relief was immense. Hannibal wasn't holding back at all, and his rhythm was uneven and brutal. Will was cracked open -- he didn't need to be contained by his skin anymore, and his skin was such a poor vessel; there was far too much forced into Will's mind, too many thoughts and feelings; blood and antlers and wire -- Hannibal broke him open. Will came, white hot, and it seemed to last an eternity, like Hannibal forced more and more pleasure out of him until he was blissfully empty. Hannibal came into him with a sharp snap of his hips and an anguished sound that leveled out to a sweet, low moan.

If only Will could stay like this, torn open and extended beyond himself so he didn't have to contain it all anymore. Drifting, floating, blissed out. But Will's mind began to pull the pieces of himself back together: awareness of his surroundings, the stings and aches of his body, conscious thoughts and obsessive whispers in the corners. Part of him knew something terrible, and it felt like a limb had been torn from him, a critical ache. He didn't know what he knew, couldn't articulate it, the sense that he was doomed, that what was broken could not come together again. Maybe these were Hannibal's feelings. Maybe they had finally cut away the barriers between them, and were one. Hannibal's loss.

Will cried like he hadn't in years, tears spilling down his cheeks and loud sobs wracking his body. Hannibal held him close. He didn't even ask, he just tucked Will into his arms and stroked his hair until he was spent.

Chapter End Notes

off screen, Hannibal breaks into Freddie's apartment while she goes to the crime scene, and deletes copies of the photos. how??? does Hannibal even know what the cloud is??? I'm sure Freddie is very secure about her blackmail. hannibal probably gets Chiyo to help him out.

Evil Eye

Chapter Summary

Think of me as yours Will had said, and Hannibal did, since the moment he saw him, at first a puzzle to test himself against and then so much more. Hannibal had Will in so many ways but it wasn't nearly enough.

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Hannibal has a new patient. Will draws Hannibal.

Chapter Notes

the monday / friday update schedule is getting difficult with the length of my chapters (they just keep getting longer!) so I'm going to switch to just updating fridays for a bit. I had to cut a whole scene from this chapter because it just wasn't working. hopefully I'll get the writing flowing again and will be able to update twice a week again.

this chapter is mostly from Hannibal's pov!

tumblr

Hannibal had a meeting with a potential new patient. After the sudden loss of Frederick, he had considered not taking on another, for it would give him more time to pursue his other activities and attend to Will. He did not strictly need to work for money, but psychiatry entertained him. Whereas in surgery, Doctor Lecter had learned the inner workings of the human body, with psychiatry he dived into the mind, a more ambiguous and fruitful territory. All human bodies worked more or less the same way, but not so with the mind -- the labyrinth of grey matter was filled with the warring and coupling of memories, egos, paradigms, and instincts. He had not been long in his practice before he grew bored with the anxieties of the typical swine. They were so easy to manipulate, their inner workings obvious to him. So, with time, Hannibal began to cultivate patients that interested him, taking on difficult cases and gently turning away those that bored him. Hannibal had a pattern of finding violent psychopaths and coaxing their darkness to the surface.

He knew their scent.

It was on a whim that Hannibal decided to meet this potential patient, a woman who had been evasive in their email correspondence. Hannibal liked to get a sense of a patient before putting them in his calendar. All Miss Marie Ward had divulged was that she had a difficult history with psychiatrists, but thought it was time to try again. A potentially difficult patient, and one who it would be easy to terminate sessions with should she prove tiresome. Why not?

Marie Ward arrived early. Hannibal kept her in the waiting room until it was exactly 3:00, and then opened the door. Standing a few paces from the door was an odd looking white woman, and the first thing Hannibal noticed was a complex arrangement of scents. "Miss Ward," Hannibal greeted her with a nod, holding the door open. "Come in."

As she passed, Hannibal breathed her scent in -- motor oil, cigarette smoke, dry shampoo, laundry detergent, but no trace of food, and, inexplicably, the smell of cloves. Hannibal scrutinized her, no expression apparent on his face. She looked around his huge office with a soft noise of surprise, taking note of the chairs but not yet moving to sit. "Nice place," she said in a husky voice.

"Thank you. Would you like a seat?" Hannibal gestured to the chair.

She looked at him with a grin. It was difficult to determine her age, but she couldn't have been older than 35. Her face was slightly warped from a broken nose that had set badly, and the gaunt look of starvation, skin stretched tight over wide features. Her eyes were slightly too far apart, and her brown hair was cut in a men's style. "Normally I would never be able to afford someone like you," she said with her crooked smile -- her jaw, too, was at an angle. "But I've been saving up."

Hannibal sat down first, mildly irritated that Miss Ward was still standing. He glanced over her clothes: all wrinkled and practical, well-worn jeans and a bulky sweater disguising her form. Her shoes however were sneakers with a hole in the toe, impractical for the cold weather. She knew his rates, and by all evidence should not be able to afford him as a psychiatrist; and yet, she was enthusiastic about meeting him. Curiosity peaked, Hannibal said, "I do have a sliding scale for patients in economically precarious situations. We can discuss the matter if we wish to pursue further sessions."

"Mmm." Miss Ward finally sat down across from Hannibal, inspecting the chair. "Sounds good."

"Why are you looking for a psychiatrist at this point in your life, Miss Ward?" Hannibal asked, folding his hands in a steeple.

"I haven't been to one in awhile," she said with a shrug. "I've had many over the years. Many. It seemed like the thing to do. But it never worked out, and eventually I gave up, never found a replacement."

"Why did you give up?" Hannibal inquired.

She blinked at him. Smiled. It might have just been the slightly skewed anatomy of her face, but there was an atypical quality to her expressions. "I realized that I didn't need them," she replied.

Hannibal raised his brows. "And now you are trying again."

She nodded. "I still don't need a psychiatrist," she said, "Or at least, I don't think I do. But I miss having someone I can talk to, really talk to, without repercussions."

"A confidant?" Hannibal suggested.

"Exactly! There's no one in my life I can talk to about the real me." She leaned back in the chair, exploring the room with her gaze.

"One doesn't need to be troubled or mentally ill to desire for or benefit from therapy," Hannibal said.

"Oh, of course not," Miss Ward said to Hannibal's desk, amused as if they were sharing an inside joke.

"It would be helpful to know some of the reasons you sought therapy in the past, and how your therapists were unsatisfactory."

"That's fair," Miss Ward said, head tilted back to observe the ceiling. She was unconcerned with observing Hannibal, so he did not bother with falsifying his expressions and remained neutral. "All sorts of reasons," she said, sounding bored. "The usual reasons one goes to a psychiatrist: depression, suicidal ideation, changing careers, childhood sexual abuse, the typical gauntlet of trauma. I used to think I was really messed up in the head, and that I should try to 'heal'." She had obvious disdain for the word. Suddenly she leaned forward, arms on her knees, and leveled a piercing look at Hannibal. "I've been diagnosed with a number of disorders, whatever, I don't put much stock in that. I'm not interested in medication by the way."

Hannibal wasn't phased. "Do you still feel depressed or experience suicidal ideation?"

She shook her head, looking mildly disappointed with the routine question. "I'm not suicidal anymore. Depressed -- eh, I don't know."

"What about post traumatic stress?" The doctor inquired. "You sound well versed in diagnosis and trauma therapy."

"Oooh, yes," Ward said, obviously fed up with the entire branch of therapy. "It's not the sort of thing that ever goes away, is it? Still, my life isn't dictated by it anymore. I dictate my life."

"I imagine you are not interested in traditional trauma therapies, or perhaps do not even find it necessary to dive into past traumas," Hannibal said. "I have no agenda of 'healing' for you, and will not demand that you divulge your past to me. Your sessions are for you, and we can use them how you like."

Ward nodded, tapping her fingers impatiently on the arms of the chair. "Yes, yes. You're quick on the uptake. There's no need to go into the gory details. The past is a foreign land and all men are strangers there, or whatever." She paused, looking back at Hannibal, suddenly very still. When she spoke her voice was slower and more thoughtful. "When I tell therapists about my past, they see a story of who they think I am; I can see it, the moment they realize where I come from, like 'ah, so that explains it all!' But they don't understand."

"Were you frustrated with the ease that your therapists attributed you to your trauma?" Hannibal noted the shift of mannerisms and cadence in the woman across from him. As she spoke his mind quickly appraised her. She seemed obsessed with her history with mental health professionals, yet so frustrated with past therapists. She felt superior to them.

"Oh yes," Ms. Ward said, pleased that Hannibal understood. "They tied me and my story up in a neat little bow."

Hannibal narrowed his eyes. The scent was here, and he allowed a fond smile to grace his features. "It seems to me that you are one to defy categorization."

She smiled. "I try. You should know that I have a history of manipulating therapists. It's not that I want to lie; it just all feels like lies at this point."

"I am a difficult person to manipulate, Ms. Ward," Hannibal said affably. "Is that what you are after: a challenge?"

"No, no," she said. "I have other means of challenging myself. I really did mean that I just want to talk to someone. I feel like I've been a lone variable in a sea of chaos. The existential dread of loneliness is starting to get to me, maybe."

"All humans need contact and companionship," Hannibal said. "Even those of us who feel apart from the throngs of humanity. The desire to be understood is a powerful one."

"It's hard to find the right audience."

"I'm curious," Hannibal said, leaning forward. "How did you find me?"

"With great purpose," Ward replied, lowering her eyes and tilting her head in an unmistakable gesture of deference -- far preferable to Tobias's presumptive stare. "You attract certain people like vultures to a carcass. And, if I may be so bold, you suck at noticing when you're being followed."

That was more than enough confirmation. Now Hannibal needed to know if she would be a threat to him or Will. “Are you another scavenger, Miss Ward?” Hannibal asked.

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Will was beautiful, in ways Hannibal could not put to paper, or compose for the harpsichord, or even fully reconcile with what he knew about himself. That Will was physically attractive paled in comparison to the improbability of his existence: a true empath who thrust himself into the darkest minds of humanity and emerged, traumatized and ragged, but clinging fiercely to his sense of self. *Think of me as yours,* Will had said, and Hannibal did, since the moment he saw him, at first a puzzle to test himself against and then so much more. Hannibal had Will in so many ways but it wasn't nearly enough.

The strength of his feeling for the other man had at first concerned Hannibal. He could put those feelings aside, acknowledged and dismissed, but they came back to him in unexpected moments -- an offhand remark, unexpected poetry from those lips, his bright and powerful laugh. Hannibal didn't want to put his feelings of affection aside, so he didn't. Maybe one day, he wouldn't be able to.

"I've taken up with a man," Hannibal had told Bedelia. "I've spoken of him before: Will Graham."

Bedelia wasn't surprised but had the grace to pretend she was. "The FBI profiler," she said in her slow, careful tone.

"The very same."

"You want to be understood."

Hannibal gave her a thin lipped smile. "Don't we all?"

Bedelia cocked her head. "You spend an enormous effort keeping others from understanding you, Hannibal. You build walls and choose each mask with obsessive precision. You have, by all appearances, prevented anyone from seeing past your human veil."

"I have parted the curtains for you," Hannibal said.

"I see only flickers of shadows," Bedelia said, and Hannibal wondered if it made her feel safer to impress upon him that she did not see him for what he was. "You give me hints, nothing more."

Hannibal didn't correct her. Bedelia would compartmentalize him; it was her way of keeping from seeing too much. "Will is aware that I want to be seen, and knows how difficult that will be."

"I imagine Will wants to understand you."

Hannibal inclined his head. "Indeed."

"What are you afraid of?"

"Precious little," Hannibal replied easily. "There are few people with whom I have made more than a superficial connection," he explained. "More than an intellectual value assessment. Most of those people I have lost."

"What do you imagine will happen if Will Graham sees past your human veil?"

Hannibal considered. "I imagine that we will both be changed. By looking, Will shall see a piece of himself reflected in me. There is no looking without being seen."

"Are you afraid of rejection?" Bedelia asked.

"No," Hannibal said, and Bedelia couldn't hide the flicker of fear in her eyes.

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Hannibal had magnificent plans for Will. He had no doubt that Will would exceed his expectations, and there was danger there, but some temptations were too delicious to resist. Hannibal had known Will for little over a day before he arranged to have Will kill Garett Jacob Hobbs (which was record-fast second hand murder). Whenever Will mentioned seeing the phantom of Hobbs, Hannibal felt a swell of pride -- *I put that in your mind*. Like rubbing herbs between his fingers to bring out the aroma, Hannibal aroused the seeds of violence in Will's imagination. Whispers against his sweaty brow during the throes of night terrors, acceptance of his dark fantasies, pushing Will

too far too often, instructing Will on the acceptable ways to harm himself. Hannibal was instilling dependence, wielding both the hand that hurt Will and the hand that healed him; and when Hannibal instructed Will to cut himself in the speaker of his cell, he heard Will's pleading "yes" like a sacrament.

More often, Will dressed up for Hannibal, wearing the clothes Hannibal had bought. Will even wore some of the clothes to work, although he always brought them back to his designated drawer in Hannibal's closet, freshly laundered. They belonged to Hannibal after all.

Will's table manners left something to be desired. Hannibal could see that Will didn't enjoy being trained, often making cutting comments about Hannibal's wealth and obsessive nature; but Will also wanted to please Hannibal, and his mind was quieted when given specific tasks. It was impossible to tell if Will would be difficult or compliant in a given night.

Will was not being purposefully difficult that night, but he was distracted. Hannibal watched a piece of sashimi fall gracelessly back to the plate with irritation. He supposed it was his own fault for preparing a Japanese dish and expecting Will *not* to hold his chopsticks like an ape, but he was frustrated. Hannibal had prepared a kaiseki meal that Lady Murasaki had once prepared for him, and to have it go unappreciated was, well, rude. The table was artfully arranged with small dishes: yam cut in tortoiseshell pattern, vinegar crab, simmered turnips with shrimp and yuzu citron, and perfect cuts of sashimi topped with roe. The ingredients were slightly different than those Murasaki had used, since Hannibal would only prepare local seasonal foods for kaiseki, but the arrangement and dishes were all inspired by her.

Hannibal held out his own hand, showing Will again how to hold the chopsticks. "You're crossing them," Hannibal explained as if it was the simplest matter in the world. "Instead, hold the upper chopstick with thumb, forefinger, and middle finger, and let the other rest beneath. Move only the upper one to pinch the food against the lower."

Will gave him an incredulous look. "Can't I just get a fork? I'm starving."

Hannibal fought back his frown. "No. How else will you learn if you don't practice?"

"How am I supposed to practice when you keep glaring at me?"

"I am not glaring," Hannibal said, making his face blank.

Will chuckled. "Oh, yes you are, I can see it."

Hannibal returned to his food, picking up a beautiful piece of unagi. He could see Will roll his eyes. "If you can't eat properly then you shan't eat at all," Hannibal said, unable to keep the bite from his voice.

Will groaned, and tried again. He struggled to hold the chopsticks like Hannibal did, and went for the sticky clumps of rice. He managed to get a few small bites by leaning over his plate. Hannibal tapped the wood of the table sharply, signaling to Will that his posture was wrong, and Will huffed in frustration. "Why is this so important to you?" Will snapped.

"Manners are important, Will."

"I feel like you're setting me up for a test I'm bound to fail," Will said, twirling the chopsticks in his hand. "I eat Chinese take-out out of the carton with a fork."

"This isn't Chinese take out," Hannibal said venomously.

Will startled at the hurt in Hannibal's voice, and then grew annoyed. "Christ Hannibal, I wasn't comparing. I'm just saying I don't know how to hold chopsticks and I'm starving and frustrated."

Hannibal closed his eyes for a moment, reining back his displeasure. He was being unfair. He sighed and looked at Will, trying to recall his affection for the man to soften the edge of his annoyance. "This meal was once made for me by someone I loved dearly," Hannibal explained. "That is why I prepared it. This is not a test."

Will stared at him in shock, and then his features brightened as he laughed. "Are you trying to be romantic, Doctor Lecter?" Will asked with a playful grin.

Hannibal frowned. "Of course. Obviously I'm not succeeding."

Will gave him an affection look, still marred by some frustration. "That's very sweet Hannibal, really. But I'm not you, and I can't enjoy a romantic meal if I'm being judged for how I eat it."

Hannibal gave a sigh of admission. "I suppose you're right."

"Were you even going to tell me about the significance of this meal, or did you just want to watch me consume it?" Will asked. "Am I supposed to be part of the artful arrangement?"

Hannibal supposed he wouldn't feel so irritated if Will wasn't correct. "I was going to tell you, but then I was distracted by your abominable table manners."

"Sorry to disappoint," Will said, not sorry at all.

Hannibal shook his head. "No, I was remiss in expecting so much from you." He smirked.

"You're intolerable."

Hannibal beckoned Will with a curl of his finger. Will nearly rolled his eyes again, and pushed out of his chair. He knew what Hannibal was asking of him, and knelt besides his chair, a hand on Hannibal's knee. Hannibal gave him an approving nod, and picked out a piece of sashimi. Will opened his mouth and accepted the slice of raw fish with a familiar tremble of vulnerable arousal. Hannibal watched him chew slowly and swallow, memorizing every detail.

"Who made you this meal?" Will asked.

The decision to tell Will didn't come to him easily, and he fed Will another bite before speaking. It felt as if telling Will any piece of his history would lead everything to leak out like the final crack in a damn. To speak of Lady Murasaki was to speak of the orphanage, and from there his parents' deaths, the loss of Mischa, and then -- and then: the circumstances of that loss, the winter where Hannibal was born in pain and hunger. Perhaps Will would not know immediately that he was the Chesapeake Ripper; maybe pity would cloud his judgement. Perhaps. No, Hannibal could not tell Will of Mischa yet, though that erasure was no doubt taking shape in Will's mind.

Will looked at him expectantly.

"My uncle's wife," Hannibal said at last. "Her name is Lady Murasaki. I came to live with them for some time, and then, after my uncle passed, we remained close."

"Did you have a relationship with her?" Will asked.

"Yes," Hannibal admitted. "It was from her that I received the set of samurai armor. She was very proud of her family ancestry."

Will frowned. "Is she still alive?"

Hannibal nodded, tucking a stray curl behind Will's ear. "Yes. We have not spoken in many years. I do not know if I will see her again."

Will accepted another piece of fish. There was a slight flush of embarrassment to his cheeks. "Should I not ask?"

Hannibal raised his brows. "After my relationship with Murasaki?"

Will looked away, thinking. "She gave you a family heirloom but doesn't want to see you again."

"You're making assumptions."

"Do I assume wrong?"

Hannibal took a bite. "We did not part on the best terms but we understood each other. It would have been foolish for both of us if I had stayed."

Will looked at him expecting more, but Hannibal made no further comment. The gears were turning in Will's mind, and Hannibal wondered if his silences spoke too loudly. "Do you still love her?" Will asked.

"I remember her fondly," Hannibal replied. "It's one of the reasons I left for America: so that I could love her as she was, and not force her to change for me."

There was a look of understanding on Will's face, and then a wince, as some painful thought reared its ugly head in his mind. Hannibal touched his cheek. The smile on Will's face was the one that followed pain he believed was deserved; a self deprecative twitch of the lips. "What is it?" Hannibal asked.

Will shook his head. "Nothing. Just thought of a stupid question."

"Tell me."

"No," Will said sharply, and there was that smile again. "No, I -- no."

"Will." Hannibal grabbed his chin and forced his eyes up. Will's lips pulled back to bear teeth. For a moment he looked like a cornered animal. Hannibal wanted to see every thought that flickered

across that brilliant mind, especially the thoughts Will was ashamed of.

"Don't make me say it," Will pleaded, glaring up at him. "Make me kneel on your floor to be hand-fed, but don't demand every unimportant passing thought."

Hannibal ran his hands through Will's hair, both a gesture of comfort and a threat as he curled the locks into his fist. "If it was an unimportant thought you wouldn't be so ashamed of voicing it."

"There's plenty I don't say, Hannibal. Plenty you don't say."

Hannibal twisted the strands of Will's hair in his fist until he hissed in pain. "I'll ask you once more," Hannibal said in a neutral voice. "What question do you not wish to ask me?"

Will clenched his jaw and endured the pain. He didn't attempt to stop Hannibal, just took his punishment. Finally he opened his eyes, smiling cruelly, and Hannibal relaxed the grip on his hair. "I thought to ask," Will said spitefully, "if you love me."

Hannibal did not know how to respond. He nearly took his hand back, but then thought that would strike Will as a rejection, so instead he rested his hand on Will's neck. His pulse was rapid. Hannibal's lips parted and then closed. A violent blush heated Will's skin, and he looked away from the blank expression Hannibal wore.

"Ah," Hannibal said, but the next words failed to come to mind.

"Told you it was stupid," Will murmured.

"You have caught me off guard."

"Right." Will's shoulders hunched. "I'm going to go die of mortification now."

It felt like a moment that might break easily, and Hannibal wasn't sure how to handle it. He did not wish to lie to Will -- he detested lying, really, but especially regarding his own emotions. "To assign a name to my feeling for you seems inadequate," Hannibal said at last. "And love is dangerous. You would have difficulty accepting my love, should I name it as such. And, I confess, I have difficulty understanding my feelings for you."

Will looked up at him, eyes full of hope and fear.

"You have compromised me, Will," Hannibal said, "In ways I should fear but instead relish. There is very little I would not do to keep you at my side."

Will leaned into Hannibal's hand, features twitching as he struggled to accept what Hannibal was saying. "It feels like a yes or no question and I don't know what to do with either answer."

"An entirely false dichotomy," Hannibal said kindly. "I will show you how I feel for you, as I have, and I hope you will continue to accept."

Hannibal did not ask if Will loved him.

If it was love, it would be the kind to set the whole world on fire.

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They took sake into the study. Hannibal sat in the armchair by the fireplace, and before Will could take a seat he held up a hand. Trained to receive instructions, Will stood straight and waited for what Hannibal would say. "Strip for me," Hannibal said, crossing his legs.

Will gave him an appraising look. None of Hannibal's instruments were here, save for drawing materials. Will took off his clothes, folding each item as he did. He was used to being nude before Hannibal now, and simply stood before him with hands by his side. Hannibal admired the sheen of his skin in the firelight, the flicker of shadows across muscle and bone. "Sit before the fire," Hannibal instructed.

Will bit his lip, eyes searching. He sat down on the rug near Hannibal's chair, uncertain of how to arrange himself -- at first he tucked his legs and leaned against an arm, but then bent one knee to his chest and sat forward. Hannibal drank in the sight of him, and waiting for the next instructions, Will stared at the fire. His profile was surprisingly soft: a gentle sloping brow, round nose, and thin lips. His curls turned golden at the edges in the firelight, a vivid aura around the deep red shadows of his face.

“I would like you to draw me,” Hannibal said at last. “I'm curious how you would translate what you see.”

Will gave him a curious look. “Didn't realize I needed to be naked for that.”

“You don't.” Hannibal rose from the chair and went to the desk, gathering the drawing supplies. When he returned Will was still giving him a questioning look, so he added, “I was going to punish you.”

“For the chopsticks?” Will asked with a huff of laughter.

“You were ungrateful.”

Will stared, in part incredulous and defensive, and in part worried. “Hannibal, I *am* grateful -- shit. I'm sorry if I’m out of it, but --”

Hannibal cut him off with a motion of his hand. “There is no need. I changed my mind for a reason.” He handed Will a drawing pad and metal case with pencils and eraser. “This is not a punishment.”

“I've disappointed you,” Will said in a quiet voice. He glanced away. “Do you have charcoal?”

“Soft or compressed?” Hannibal asked

“I really don't know.”

Hannibal went back to the desk.

Will opened the drawing pad and peered through the pages, but they were all blank. Hannibal must have removed each page after he completed a drawing. “It’s alright to want things. Hannibal,” Will said. “Sometimes I’ll disappoint you. That has to be alright.”

“I am not upset,” Hannibal said, handing Will the charcoal and promptly returning to his seat. No gesture of affection, no brushing Will’s curls from his brow. Hannibal settled in the armchair. “Tell me if you wish me to move.” He gazed into the fire.

“You're calculating what you would change to obtain your desired outcome,” Will said, tilting his head back and forth as he examined Hannibal’s face, not looking to read him for once but paying attention to the features for their own sake.

“I need not calculate,” Hannibal replied. “You will learn how to properly use chopsticks.”

Will sighed. “Any particular reason you made this special meal tonight?”

“All the food I cook for us is carefully considered.” Hannibal paused. “I felt inspired today.”

Will leaned back against the other armchair and picked up a piece of soft charcoal. He wasn't sure what he was doing, and hesitated before making a first mark, glancing from Hannibal’s face to the paper and back again. Hannibal’s face was tilted towards the fire and contrasted with light and shadow. Will wanted to start with the eyes but was sure he couldn't render them and kept making false starts. “I don't even know how to begin,” he confessed.

“Don't draw what you know to be there,” Hannibal said. “Really look. Think of the charcoal as an extension of what you see.”

Will pouted. He pressed the charcoal to paper and it broke immediately. Surprised at how soft it was, Will used a gentler touch to draw the outline of Hannibal’s face: prominent brow, jutting cheekbones, and the jut of his chin that Will have not realized before was so round. It already looked terrible and distorted, but Will pressed on. He traced Hannibal’s sharp nose and used thick marks to draw the shadows cast by the fire. When he made an attempt at the eyes, he promptly smudged the charcoal. “Well, I just ruined it,” Will said as he looked at the grey smudge down his pinkie.

Hannibal didn’t even glance at him. “The soft charcoal can be smudged nearly clean off the page. You mustn’t be afraid to make a mess in the pursuit of art.”

“That’s rich, coming from you,” Will muttered.

“The charcoal can be layered and pressed into the paper for a darker tone. The condensed charcoal won’t smudge as easily, but also can not be completely erased.”

Smudges of charcoal littered the page. Will rubbed dark marks to indicate the deep-set lid of Hannibal’s eyes. He made an attempt at drawing the eyes themselves, but the stick of charcoal was too thick and imprecise, and Will kept smudging his attempts away, leaving grey swaths underneath the brows. He moved on to the lips instead -- two curved lines for the top lip, one for the bottom. Will switched to the condensed charcoal and made the shadows on the right of Hannibal’s face darker, his poor attempt at an ear disappearing in black. He wanted to do a good job, not to please Hannibal, but to capture something honest about what he saw in the other man. He picked up the eraser and tried to fix his skewed drawing, and it was more like carving Hannibal’s face than drawing it.

“Can you stay still but look at me?” Will asked. The eyes in the drawing were still just smudges.

Hannibal looked at Will. He had such masterful control over his body, remaining entirely still as he rotated his eyes to look at the other man. Will swallowed. Hannibal’s eyes were dark and unreadable in this light. An ache that was becoming familiar blossomed in Will’s chest. He wanted to see Hannibal. Wanted to slip through the barriers and defenses, walk in his memory palace, and see what he saw behind closed lids. When Will finished drawing the eyes, and looked at the drawing as a whole, they looked flat on the face, utterly inadequate. Growing frustrated, Will erased them and tried again. The result was a mess.

Will looked back at Hannibal, thinking. To see and be seen. A mirror Hannibal wished to polish to perfection. What did Hannibal want him to see, and with his level of control, why did he want Will to see? Will drew a pair of eyes floating in the blank space of the page, trying to get them right, again and again; and soon the page was filling up with eyes, some crude and cartoonish, some dark and others pale. As he drew he inevitably smudged the page, then turned those smudges into more pairs of eyes.

Will wiped the sweat from his brow, staring down at the mess on the page. Hannibal’s face, turned away, surrounded by eyes that seemed like they were multiplying. Will rubbed the back of his neck, feeling a flush of embarrassment. “Well. It’s… something.”

Hannibal rolled his head on his neck. “Show me.”

Will sighed, and got to his feet. “I’ll understand if you want to punish me,” Will joked, and shoved the pad towards Hannibal, looking away.

Hannibal took the proffered drawing reverently, hands careful to hold the sides and not touch the page. Too embarrassed to look at his reaction, Will stared into the fire, holding an arm. But he heard the soft note of surprise that escaped Hannibal’s lips. “Oh, Will,” Hannibal breathed.

Will glanced back, his stomach flipping at the recognizable pleasure in Hannibal’s voice. Hannibal was smiling, soft and genuine. “Remarkable,” Hannibal said.

“It’s really not,” Will muttered, cheeks hot.

Hannibal looked up at him fondly. “I assume you are familiar with the evil eye?”

Will shrugged.

Hannibal beckoned him closer. Will sat down on the floor between Hannibal’s legs, draping his crossed arms over one thigh. “The evil eye is a curse that causes illness or injury,” Hannibal explained. “Charms to repel the malevolent gaze are also sometimes called evil eyes, and resemble an eye. This concept occurs all over the world, prominently in West Asia. The image of an eye protects and turns away the evil eye. Why do you think that is?” Hannibal ran a hand through Will’s hair, down to curl a finger beneath his chin and tilt his face up.

“A reflection?” Will thought aloud. “Scares the evil eye away. Or tells the evil eye that something is already there? Depiction as a way of… of capturing something.”

“There are many answers,” Hannibal replied, now stroking Will’s cheek. “Even evil must be mesmerized by an image of itself.”

Hannibal set the drawing aside. Will sat up on his knees, hands spreading up Hannibal's thighs as he pressed up to the other man. Hannibal held his jaw, and Will turned into the touch, kissing his palm. He arched up, naval pressed against the edge of the chair between Hannibal's legs. Will squeezed Hannibal's hips. Let him look. Flicked his gaze up as Hannibal touched his face and pressed his bottom lip down with a thumb. Will caught his thumb between teeth and flicked out his tongue, and Hannibal made a low noise of pleasure. Will crawled on top of him, taking his face between both hands and staring down at him, drinking in the sight of him like it would be the last time. Why did it always feel like it was the last time? Will could feel himself stepping close and closer to the edge of some impossible abyss, the edge deadly sharp, the fall into darkness inevitable; and he was walking Hannibal towards it hand in hand. Hannibal would let him -- why? The shattering of glass, edges reforming in gold. Will was lost in the gordian knot of their gaze, looking and being seen. Could they contain it? Or was it like looking into the sun, scarring-bright? Will kissed him, and couldn't say whether or not the taste of desperation was entirely his own.

Nightmare

Chapter Summary

Monster, *his mind hissed*, see? He will leave you, and the only way to keep him is to consume him.

If he kneeled before Hannibal, the other man would run his hands through his hair and soothe the nightmarish wounds. He would murmur sweet nothings in his mother tongue, hold him, keep him close.

You can't have that, *his mind whispered.* There's a monster in the room. You are not safe.

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Will's mind tries to tell him that there is danger, so he breaks what he can: a rule.

Chapter Notes

I should be back to the friday / monday update schedule! I was writing this chapter and the next as one but there was just so much case plot happening, I decided to split it and add more smut. because, really, if you don't have murder in your chapter you HAVE to have some sex.

thanks for reading. tumblr

cw: discussion of murder-rapes for the case, nothing graphic. on-screen self-harm very briefly described.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Hannibal." Will touched the edge of the curtains at the window, nudging them aside to look out at the night. The interior of the office was overlaid on the street outside, more a stained glass than a window. "I can't explain it," Will said, "But when I'm with you I feel like I'm dying. I'm not trying to push you away, but I can't help but feel that what we have is a terminal prognosis."

He closed his eyes. His chest ached so terribly that he could barely form words. In the window, Hannibal was a mere silhouette, watching him. "I look at you and see someone I've already lost," Will breathed. "Why? What's wrong with me?"

"You are transforming," Hannibal said, voice echoing strangely in the space. "You are becoming the most beautiful version of yourself."

Will turned. Hannibal was closer than he expected, and when he met his eyes they were completely black. Fear flooded Will as those white-less eyes bore into him, and, recognized for what it was, the

monster emerged from beneath Hannibal's skin. The suit melted into tar-black skin; bones creaked as the creature grew taller, looming over Will; and antlers blossomed from its head.

"No!" Will screamed as the monster pounced on him, slamming him against the window. Ice-cold claws stroked his face, and antlers burst out and caged him against the wall. Will fought back with a fury, but his fists sunk uselessly into the tar body of the monster. The black muck crawled up Will's limbs and he was sinking in -- his ribs burst out of his skin, revealing the tangled nest of his heart, aching so terribly -- and hands were on him, everywhere, making a mockery of affectionate touch -- Will screamed -- his throat tore open -- he shredded the dream to pieces.

Swathes of black flew through the air, flesh slipped bloody under his hands, he couldn't see, couldn't breathe, but felt a vulnerable throat under his hands and squeezed hard. *Die! Die!*

The tar hardened and chipped off his face, and Will could see.

Moonlight came from the little window above Hannibal's bed, painting them in a soft glow. Hannibal lay beneath him, eyes lidded, mouth open, a vein popping on his forehead. Someone had their hands on his throat.

Will's insides hardened and shattered, glass twisting and crunching in his gut.

No no no no!

He punched Hannibal in the face.

Will wailed in horror, throwing himself back as if he was the one who was punched. He hit the floor and scrambled until his back was to the wall and he clutched his head, hyperventilating, fear spiking through him hot and cold. "No no no no," he uttered over and over, and gasped for breath. He couldn't breathe, he was drowning, he had choked Hannibal, hit him, hurt him, in his sleep, out of his control, he needed to breathe, he *couldn't*.

Hannibal lay very still on the bed. He touched his left cheek. The skin had split and stung horribly, throbbing with the promise of a heavy bruise. Hannibal sat up. Will was cowering in a ball by the wall, pulling at his hair and breathing very erratically. Hannibal could smell the fear on him, sour amongst the sweet fragrance of his fevered sleep.

"Will," Hannibal said calmly, voice rasping. "You need to breathe. You are awake --"

"I know I'm fucking awake!" Will yelled in a high, strangled voice. He clutched at himself. "God, no, no." His breath came in sharp and shallow.

Hannibal swung his legs over the edge of the bed slowly. "You need to breathe. You're having an anxiety attack."

"I... I --" Will sobbed dryly. "I choked you. I. I hit you." Will tried to breathe. It was hard. He sucked air through his teeth. "I need to go," he said, rising clumsily to his feet. "I have to go. Oh -- god."

Hannibal stood up and took a step towards him. "Will, I --"

"Don't fucking touch me!" Will shouted.

Hannibal froze.

Will flinched, curling in on himself. He hid his face in his hands. "Oh god, oh god, fuck. I choked you, I --" He peered through his hands, looking in Hannibal's general direction. "Are you... are you alright?"

"I am fine," Hannibal said, voice still choked. "Both my cheek and your hand need some attention. Would you get a steak from the freezer? I wish to mitigate the swelling."

Will looked at Hannibal's face and assessed the damage. He could see finger marks on his neck even in the dark. His frightened mind latched on the task, and he nodded.

Halfway down the stairs Will shrank against the wall and sobbed, a few bitter tears stinging his eyes.

He opened the kitchen freezer and took out a slab of meat. His hands didn't look like his own.

When he returned to the bedroom, Will's head was bowed. He breathed hard but even, trying to keep the panic at bay. He handed the frozen meat to Hannibal without looking at him. "I'm leaving," Will said.

Hannibal lifted the meat to his swelling cheek, and sat back on the edge of the bed. "Please stay," Hannibal said, an unusual tremble of emotion in his voice.

Will choked back another sob, taking a half step back. "I can't -- I can't," he insisted harshly. "I can't sleep in your bed, I can't handle this, Hannibal -- I'm *not safe*. I hurt you."

"Please, Will. I want you to stay."

Will screwed his eyes shut and shook his head.

"It is not often that I ask something of you," Hannibal said. "Don't leave me."

Will's legs sagged. He swayed. He was held in place by bloody antlers. Hannibal reached out for him, his hand a gentle invitation. "I can't touch you right now," Will said quietly. "I can't be touched. I'm afraid what would happen."

"I am not."

Rage bubbled hot inside Will, and he glared at Hannibal, the words lashing out of him. "Maybe you should be! Look at your fucking neck! I could have strangled you in my sleep and woken up to a fucking corpse!"

Hannibal was calm, a sad longing apparent on his features. He looked vulnerable, mortal, like he had after he killed Tobias. Will knew that he could yell all he wanted, but Hannibal would remain his bedrock. It was infuriating. This would be so much easier if Hannibal was angry with him. Will wanted to drop to his knees before him, give in to Hannibal's impenetrable control and bathe in his vast acceptance.

Will also wanted to strangle him to death. The murderous desire was embedded in him -- *monster*, his mind hissed, *see? He will leave you, and the only way to keep him is to consume him.*

If he kneeled before Hannibal, the other man would run his hands through his hair and soothe the nightmarish wounds. He would murmur sweet nothings in his mother tongue, hold him, keep him close.

You can't have that, his mind whispered. *There's a monster in the room. You are not safe.*

Hannibal dropped his hand. "I understand that you do not wish to share a bed with me. If you will not acquiesce, I ask that you sleep in the guest bedroom." His voice was rough at the edges with more than just the after affects of being choked. "I am worried for you, Will."

Will smiled, a brutal twist of his lips. "You should be."

"You knuckle is split. May I tend to it?"

"No," Will spat. He gathered his last tendrils of resolve and stood up straight, looking at the framed prints next to Hannibal's bed. "Goodnight Hannibal."

Like wrenching a knife out, Will turned on his heel and exited the bedroom, leaving Hannibal.

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In the mirror, Hannibal admired the bruise around his split cheek. It was beautiful.

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Will closed the guest bedroom door behind him, and leaned against it. He was numb and itching all at once, he didn't fit in his skin, he needed out -- out. He smacked his head back against the door, the pain grounding him. There was something very wrong with him. This wasn't just feedback from looking into killers' minds, this wasn't just trauma from working his cases. This was a deeply rooted monstrosity peeking out of the surface like the tip of an iceberg. He was finally going insane. Something had broken inside of him, maybe when he pulled the trigger on Hobbs, maybe long before, maybe when his lips first met Hannibal's. Somewhere along the way, Will Graham had began to manage his descent, and he had just hit the stride of his spiral. It was all gravity from here. No more trying to crawl out of the pit.

Will knew he was about to self destruct and hurt himself, but that recognition would not stop him. Even if he could avoid what was coming next, he wouldn't. The knowledge calmed him. Now he just needed to decide what to do.

The calm left with a wave of guilt, and he clutched himself, biting back a whine. Why must he always war with himself? He was so tired of fighting, so tired of conflicting desires and fears, he missed his dogs, wanted to run with them through the muddy fields. Will smacked his head with the heel of his palm, once, twice. He wanted to damage his treacherous hands but that was impractical;

no matter how much he wanted to punch the wall, he needed his hands functional. The wound would have to be hidden.

Nothing would be hidden from Hannibal.

Will went to the restroom down the hall, flicking on the light and wincing at the brightness. He avoided himself in the mirror, and put on a spare robe. He was split in his mind -- a part of him drifting aloft, calmly maneuvering to search the medicine cabinet; the other part a frightened animal exacerbating its wounds. The animal needed soothing. Will found what he was looking for: a pair of nail clippers.

When he was done, Will was exhausted enough to maybe fall back asleep, but he didn't want to risk sleep-walking to Hannibal. He crept quietly downstairs to the kitchen and made himself coffee in the french press. The red light over the oven told him it was 4:23 AM. He poured the coffee into a mug and took it to the dining room so he could look out the double glass doors. It was snowing again. The eye-shaped cuts on his hips ached distantly. He ignored his thoughts.

When Hannibal came downstairs it was still dark out. He stood in the entrance to the dining room in his robe, looking much as he did at the beginning of their therapy sessions, waiting patiently for Will to take the first step. "Did you sleep?" Will asked, not looking at his face.

Hannibal walked around the table and sat at the head, wanting to be close. "No,'" he answered, folding his hands upon the table. "Thankfully I need little sleep."

Will looked at him. The bruise was not so terrible but was swollen enough to push up the lower lid of his eye. Hannibal had applied a small bandage to the broken skin. Despite what he said, he looked tired. "Thank you for giving me space," Will said.

"Thank you for staying," Hannibal countered.

Will looked away with a grimace. "I couldn't comfort you. Instead I yelled at you."

"You were frightened."

Hannibal's voice in the early morning dark reminded him so much of his dream. Will glanced back at him, half expecting to see the monster emerging from his flesh. "I still am," Will confessed, and held out his hand, palm up. Hannibal enveloped it between two hands and squeezed gently. "I'm not entirely sure if I'm awake," Will said, though his eyes were clear. "A part of me thinks you should remember what I said to you in my dream, as if you were really there. Like the river. I feel like you're in my head and -- I don't want you to be." He tried to smile, and it came out more like a grimace. "You're not safe in there."

Hannibal kissed his hand. "You have opened up to me, Will, in a time of emotional turbulence. I know you would rather only harm yourself in the halls of your mind. It is a terrible thing to hurt the ones we care for." He kissed each finger, lips ghosting over the split knuckle. When Will managed to look him in the eyes, they were shining in the dark. "But believe me when I say I have wished to stand beside you in the cavern of your nightmares. It is equally terrible to watch the ones we care for hurt in places we may not follow; I wish to follow you there."

"To the ends of the earth?" Will asked. "To the very depths of hell itself? Hannibal, there are places

I go that you can't follow, and I'm glad you can't. You look into people's minds but you don't see what I see, you don't feel the kind of violence I have swimming around in my head."

Hannibal smirked. "Can you fault me for trying?"

"Yes," Will said with a brief smile. "But I do appreciate that you don't want me to be alone in here." Will tapped his skull with his free hand. "Not that I'm alone, but..."

"An ally."

"I wish. I don't think there are any ally roles for you to fill in my head."

"What did you dream about?" Hannibal asked. "Was I filling the role of the victim or the perpetrator?"

Will closed his eyes and shook his head slightly. "I need some space," he said, looking back at Hannibal so it didn't seem like he was running away. "I'm going to go home, spend some time with the pack. I want to sleep in my own bed, alone. I need to clear my head."

"I understand," Hannibal said, "Though I'd rather have your company."

"I'm sorry."

Hannibal didn't dismiss his apology and Will was grateful. He loosened his grip on Will's hand and examined the split, swollen knuckles. "Nothing broken. Icing it may yet reduce the swelling, so take an ice pack before you go." Hannibal stroked his fingers, pensive, and looked at Will. "Did you harm yourself?"

"No," Will lied with surprising ease, suddenly acutely aware of the marks on his hips, just beneath the robe. "Well, I pulled my hair and knocked my head, but nothing purposeful."

Hannibal regarded him and Will wasn't sure if the other man caught the lie. He couldn't entirely reason why he had lied, only that he needed to do this to himself without Hannibal. Needed to take something back.

"Text me if you feel the need to harm yourself," Hannibal said at last. "Wait for my command. I will try to give you space but I must insist that we work through this trauma response in our session."

Will took his hand back gently. "Yeah, ok. I don't want this to happen again."

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Will drove home as the light of dawn illuminated the grey sky, the snowfall gentle and steady. When he reached home there were a few inches on the ground that crunched under his feet. The pack greeted him when he opened the door and he bent to his knees to receive their affection, smiling and already feeling lighter as they wagged their tails and pawed at him. He changed into winter boots and walked with them through the field. They chased and played with each other, running freely in the open land but always circling back to their master. Will threw a stick for them, losing himself momentarily in the simple joy of playing with his dogs.

Will showered and changed. He forgot to eat breakfast and was on the road when Hannibal texted him to remind him of the meal, which would have been annoying if Will didn't need someone to remind him to eat regularly. He stopped for coffee and a breakfast sandwich, shoving it in his mouth without a care, tasting nothing. At the FBI he gathered the files from the Shrike copycat kills and laid them out alongside images from the latest kill at the symphony. It was the same killer, though his third kill was more elaborate and theatrical -- if it was his third, and there weren't other bodies they missed.

He pulled up everything they knew about Nicholas Boyle, which wasn't much. He was a student and hadn't been on the medical tract, but that didn't mean he couldn't figure out how to cut open a body. Though, the killer had used a respirator on the Freddie-look-alike. Regardless if Nicholas Boyle was the copycat, Tobias had serenaded the copycat. Had Tobias looked at the two Shrike copy cat kills and been inspired? Baltimore was far enough from Minnesota that it didn't make sense for Tobias to compose his serenade for those two kills, admiring from afar -- had they missed another body in Baltimore? Had Tobias somehow known Nicholas Boyle was a suspect and seen his face? The pieces almost added up? but didn't fit together perfectly.

Jack came in to the investigation room, and Will filled him in on his thinking about the copycat. "Actually," Jack said, "I wanted to talk to you about the Marionette Murderer."

Will sighed. "I don't have anything new."

Jack sat down adjacent to him, though he usually enjoyed looming over him. "You've been distracted lately," Jack said. "I don't want the Marionette to fall by the wayside. Let's compare notes."

Will leaned back in his chair. Had they brainstormed about the Marionette before? They must have, but he didn't remember. "Some cases are slow, Jack," Will reminded him. "I can't solve them all in three days."

"You usually do." Jack smiled. "I don't want to wait for another puppet act before catching her, and I've got pressure from up top."

"Alright," Will acquiesced. "What are your notes?"

"Let's start with the facts," Jack said. "What do we know about the Marionette Murderer? She kills men, usually white and between the ages of 30 and 60. The men are mostly middle class and have a range of different occupations and family situations. She often kills indirectly using industrial contraptions, especially metal wire, and displays her kills."

Will nodded. "The victims have likely solicited services from sex workers in the past, which is what connects them. Killers don't usually kill outside of their economic class, but she is likely lower class, poor. She is meticulous in her design and plans her kills far in advanced. She is highly manipulative, used to be a sex worker, if she isn't still, and creates relationships with people she can manipulate via the internet."

"She has a car and engineering skills," Jack added. "Is likely younger than 35. Why does she kill?"

Will looked up at the ceiling, the crime scenes flickering before his mind. "She does not have a

compulsion to kill. Her compulsion is to manipulate, and the... puppet shows, as you called them, are extensions of that manipulation. She is showing her superiority over these men. It may have started as revenge for soliciting her, brutal kills as she played with violence as power. But they don't deserve to be touched by her. They should be grateful she made them into something beautiful."

Jack gave him a hard look. "How do we find her first kills?"

"She travels. They won't be local. Look for..." Will swallowed, flinching as the image shot through his brain. "Look for brutal killings of men that involved asphyxiation and anal penetration. Post-mortem and then pre-mortem."

Jack just nodded. "I'll start the search. There will be a lot to look through."

And Will would be the one to look through them.

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Will got lunch and prepared for a long day of looking at old murder-rapes. This was going to be fantastic for his brain. He texted Hannibal.

Will: I want to visit Abigail. Can you make the arrangements with Alana? Need to talk about Freddie and Nicholas Boyle.

Hannibal: Of course. I will make the call now.

It was an indirect invitation for Hannibal to join him. Will smiled slightly, thinking of wading in the river with Hannibal and Abigail, a fantasy of a family born in blood.

Hannibal: Are you available tomorrow morning before your class?

Will: Sure.

Will: I'll be working some long days at the FBI. Looking for a needle in a haystack.

Hannibal: Please let me know if I can bring you lunch or dinner.

Will: I'm eating. Thanks for the reminders. I'll see you tomorrow morning.

A clear dismissal. Will would see Hannibal tomorrow to visit Abigail, and then the following evening for their appointment. It would be easy to turn down invitations to the Doctor's home since Will asked for space and they were seeing each other the next two days. He needed to put off Hannibal seeing his body for as long as possible.

From all across the country, cases were faxed in. Brutal murders of men involving penetration that were never closed, seemingly random. Will filled his head with that violence. Even Beverly looked squeamish as she glanced over his shoulder, offering half-heartedly to help him sort through them. Will turned her down. He took a break by hiding in the bathroom stall and clipping off small pieces

of skin with the nail-clippers. It helped him stay in reality, instead of floating off into the fog of disassociation.

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"Hello, Will," Alana greeted him at the entrance of the hospital the next morning, wearing her red winter coat and looking a bit sheepish. "It's good to see you."

"We've both been avoiding each other this time," Will said with a smirk. "How have you been?"

"Good," Alana replied, examining his face. "You look tired."

"I haven't been sleeping well," Will replied with a shrug.

"Besides that, how are you?" She held the door open for him, and they walked through the hospital together.

Will gave a huff of laughter. "I have a therapist, Alana."

"I know. He's waiting upstairs." There was a playful tone to her voice. They were both making it clear that their ill-advised kiss had not ruined their acquaintanceship, even if it had halted their friendship. "Can't I want to know how you are? Any new holes in the house?"

"None in the house," Will admitted. "Just in my mind."

Alana frowned. "How's Jack?" she asked sharply.

"I'm looking of my own volition," Will assured her. "It would just be easier if I could get a good night's rest."

"Might be easier to sleep if you didn't look so often."

They arrived at Abigail's room and heard the low notes of conversation between herself and Hannibal. Alana gave Will a somewhat forced smile, then opened the door. Abigail was lying on her stomach in bed, rubbing the pages of a book between her fingers. Hannibal was sitting on a chair next to the bed, looking impossibly sharp in a dark houndstooth suit and red turtleneck. The bruises on his neck were hidden, the one on his cheek faded yellow. Whatever excuse Hannibal had given for it, he had already told Alana and Abigail.

"Good morning Alana, Will," Hannibal said fondly.

"Hi," Abigail said with a smile, but there was nervous tension in her face as well.

Alana sat on the edge of the bed and Will grabbed a chair. "Hannibal was just teaching me about the Aztecs," Abigail explained, gesturing at the book beneath her.

Alana looked mildly concerned, and Will shot a smirk at Hannibal. "Your latest academic obsession?" Will asked him.

Hannibal bowed his head. "I find Mesoamerican culture fascinating."

"Don't worry," Abigail said over he shoulder to Alana. "It's not all blood-sacrifices."

"I would hope not," Alana replied, obviously not enthusiastic about the choice of subject.

"We were talking about the symbology of mirrors," Abigail explained, and Alana relaxed. Abigail sat up to look at her, childlike excitement on her face. "Did you know that people wore mirrors as armor? It was both to protect them from physical wounds and also psychic attacks. The symbology is pretty interesting, like, mirrors were associated with fire and butterflies and flowers, which were also associated with fire, and that's probably because they used mirrors to start fires."

Will couldn't help but smile at her enthusiasm. "Hannibal will make a scholar of you yet."

"I like learning," Abigail admitted with a glance at Hannibal.

"Have you thought of what you'd like to do?" Alana asked. "College is still on the table."

Abigail frowned. "I want to go to school eventually," she said. "But first I'd really like to get back to nature. Maybe go camping, when it's spring."

"I'd like to teach you how to fish," Will said suddenly. "When its warmer. There's a river I usually go to for fly-fishing."

Abigail smiled, timid but also eager. "I'd like that."

Will's smile split his whole face, the little light of joy flaring up in his chest. He tilted his head to Hannibal. "You'll have to help me convince this one to come," he said, and Abigail laughed.

"We've discussed schooling abroad," Hannibal said with a look of fond annoyance at the two of them. "Abigail should see the world, and a foreign school would help her get away from the ghosts that chase her in America. A bright mind such as hers must be applied to more than boat motors."

Will rolled his eyes. "You teach her the classics and I'll make sure she can make a buck wherever she goes."

Abigail giggled, glancing between the two of them. Alana was also observant, but Will couldn't bring himself to temper the smile on his face.

"Oh my god," Abigail said, dissolving into a fit of laughter. "I just got an image of Hannibal glamping."

Hannibal raised his eyebrows, and Alana joined Abigail in laughter. "He would, wouldn't he?"

"Dare I ask?" Hannibal sighed. Will gave him a shrug, also out of the loop.

"Glamour camping," Alana explained, struggling to reign in her smile. "Hardly camping at all. Kitchen sets, portable showers, multi-roomed tents. All the beauty of the great outdoors without any of the work."

"If I were to go camping," Hannibal scoffed, ego bruised, "I might as well do it properly."

"Not sure how you would manage without at least a two-piece suit," Will teased. "Let alone without a full spice rack."

"There is very little I need to make a proper meal," Hannibal replied with a frown. "Surely it's not against the rules of camping to bring a few spices."

Abigail laughed heartily, falling back on the bed. "Ok, now we have to go camping," she said, sitting right back up and pointing a finger at Will and Hannibal. "Promise me."

Will's stomach flipped. Oh god, he wanted to -- there was almost nothing he wanted more than to spent time with Abigail and Hannibal in the woods, away from everything. He had to hide his face for a moment.

"It's a promise," Hannibal answered, eyes wrinkling with his smile. "And I am a man who never goes back on his promises."

Will just nodded.

"Well, you three have fun," Alana said. She was looking closely at Will and Hannibal, and Will noticed that her gaze was evaluating. He looked away, feeling a blush creep up his neck.

"There's something we need to talk about, Abigail," Will said. "Two things, actually." She stopped giggling, noticing the gravity suddenly in Will's tired voice. Will gave her an apologetic smile. "Have you been talking to Freddie Lounds?"

Abigail's eyes went wide. "Yes," she said, wary. "She wants to help me tell my story."

"You don't have to tell anyone anything," Will insisted.

Abigail frowned. "That's easy for you to say. Everyone thinks I helped my father kill all those girls."

"Do you think that would change if you let Freddie write your book?" Alana asked.

"At least I would have tried," Abigail snapped.

"You will tell your own story, Abigail," Hannibal said. "But not through retelling the past and your father's story. You will write your tale with your future deeds -- what you chose to become."

"Freddie Lounds is using you," Will said, and Abigail practically glared at him.

"I'm not being used," she said sharply. "She's kind to me."

"Freddie Lounds is not kind," Will said in a low voice, letting some of his anger through. "She's manipulative. You have to learn the difference."

"It's my choice, isn't it?" Abigail asked.

Will realized his mistake -- speaking in such a way to take Abigail's agency away. He rubbed his

face. Time to change tactics. "You should know that Freddie Lounds tried to blackmail me," Will said, and heard the soft note of surprise from Alana. He met Abigail's eyes. "She stalked me and took pictures without my permission. She's a vulture, Abigail. If you really want to write a book about your father, you can find someone better to co-author it."

Abigail's wide, blue eyes made her look like a deer in the headlights. Made her look like a victim. But they changed quickly, a subtle flicker of anger and suspicion. "That's awful," Abigail said, but it sounded like a lie. Abigail glanced at Hannibal. She was calculating.

The look on Alana's face was genuine concern and anger. "She is unbelievable," Alana hissed.

"Be careful with Freddie," Will urged. "Don't believe anything she says."

"She said you were a dangerous psychopath," Abigail said.

"Case and point," Hannibal pointed out. "Not only does Ms. Lounds fundamentally misunderstand the proper use of terms for abnormal violent behavior, she is a biased and sensationalist reporter, who is not beyond slander and defamation."

Abigail looked at Hannibal sharply. "Ok, I get it. Stay away from Freddie. But I don't like not having control over my story, waiting for the shoe to drop." There was a moment of tension between her and Hannibal, then Abigail looked at her hands.

"There's something else," Will said. "We have reason to suspect that Nicholas Boyle is in Baltimore."

Abigail flinched, and then the deer-eyes were back. "Why do you think that?" she asked fearfully.

"I'm not positive that he is," Will said. "But he's a suspect of a recent murder in Baltimore. You may have lured him here."

"Do you think he will come after Abigail?" Hannibal asked.

"He shouldn't be able to get you here," Will said. "But I'll talk to Jack about assigning protection. Not sure if he would go for it, though."

"That means you have to stay in the hospital," Alana said. "No more sneaking out."

Will frowned, worried by this new piece of information. Abigail glanced at Hannibal. "Okay, I won't."

Will made a note to ask Hannibal about that later.

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All three adults left Abigail at the hospital, and walked together to the parking lot. "Farewell, Alana," Hannibal said, and then placed a hand on Will's elbow to walk him to his car. Hannibal spoke to him softly as they walked. "I will see you tomorrow for my appointment," Hannibal said. "Will you return to Wolf Trap afterwards?"

Will nodded, not looking at him. "I'm sorry."

"You will have to make it up to me," Hannibal said with a small smile.

Will stopped at his car, and Hannibal's touch lingered. He glanced and saw that Alana was watching them. "Of course, Doctor Lecter," he said. Hannibal finally removed his hand, his eyes hungry.

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Will gave his lecture automatically. He drowned himself in the cold cases, narrowing them down to ones where an object was used for the rape, if it could be determined, placing victim's faces on a map, drawing connections between major highways throughout the states. Looked for peculiarities, anything to do with bondage or excessive restraints. The day passed in a blur. Will came fully back to himself in the shower, two fingers shoved into himself painfully, and he wasn't even shocked. He turned the water cold until feeling returned to his body, shivering, touching the fresh wounds on his hips.

The next day was more of the same. He had momentum, his profile of the Marionette evolving as he saw her evolution. It fascinated him that she went from brutal, sadistic killings to ones that were dispassionate as she moved beyond the sexuality of the original murders. It was like she had used the tools of violence she knew, even if they didn't quite suit her. Will found a body that was left tied up with a belt, sheets, and rope, and knew it was her. The rest clicked after that, the timeline and locations falling into place. He had forgotten to eat lunch, and if it weren't for his alarm he would have been late to his appointment.

Beverly looked at the map with him, distaste plain on her face. "Why is she staying in Baltimore?" she asked. "Is she staying in Baltimore?"

Will nodded. "It's the stage for her final evolution. She'll stay as long as she thinks she won't get caught. Her trail doesn't start here, but something did."

"Maybe she was born here."

Will nodded. "There won't be anything in public record about her childhood. Whoever was abusing her wasn't reported. She seemed normal, but cut ties with her family after high school." He frowned. "Can you look for records of emancipated minors? I need to get to my appointment."

"No rest for the wicked," Beverly said. "It's the least I can do, after you've done all this. Are you alright? This is a lot to look at."

Will shrugged. "If I said I was alright, there would be something wrong with me."

"Probably. Forget that question -- do you want to get a drink after your date with Doctor Lecter?"

Will shook his head with a chuckle. "If you think I'm anti-social sober you should see me drunk. I'm not great company."

Beverly rolled her eyes. "We've got a pool going, for what kind of drunk you are. Zeller thinks your handsy."

Will barked out a laugh. "That's rich. What did you bet?"

Beverly smirked. "I can't tell you, that would ruin the experiment."

"Alright," Will said, gathering up his things. "I'll think about it."

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"Good evening, Will," Hannibal greeted him at his office, all professional curtesy. He wore a turtleneck again, but it was folded down, and Will could see the tips of finger-shaped bruises, the bruise on Hannibal's forehead no longer swollen and concealed with makeup. Will hung up his coat while Hannibal closed the door, and then Will took him into an embrace. Hannibal hesitated, so Will drew him closer, and then Hannibal wrapped his arms around him, tightly, breathing him in. "It's good to see you," Hannibal said softly.

Will took a deep breath. "It's good to see you too." They parted reluctantly, and took their seats. The chairs were rather close, a mere two feet between their shoes.

Will leaned back, trying to make himself comfortable for what he knew was an uncomfortable conversation. "I found the Marionette's previous kills," he said, not wanting to start by talking about himself. He bit his lip. "She raped the men with an object, at first post-mortem, then pre-mortem."

Hannibal froze, tense. "How has that affected your profile?"

"It makes me grateful that she evolved her M.O.," Will said, voice tight. "Her kills aren't less horrifying now, but they aren't as personal as they were before."

"Some forms of violence we find more or less repugnant," Hannibal said. "How did you discover her kills?"

Will grimaced. "I looked through several hundred murder-rapes. Found the ones that... spoke to me."

Hannibal was displeased, and was trying to keep it from showing. But Will could see the tension in his neck, the darkness in his eyes. "Have you been fantasizing?"

"I have tried to allow the violence to float in my mind without touching me," Will said slowly. "Instead of swimming to the surface I am trying to learn to breathe underwater. I remind myself that 'this is not me' even as I watch myself commit these acts."

"A zen-like mentality," Hannibal observed. "You let the violence move through you, not attaching to it."

"A part of me is desensitized to it," Will said. "I've filled my mind with it. There's hardly room for anything else."

"And the other part of yourself?"

Will smiled, head ticking side to side. "The other part of me is screaming," he said, articulating

each word. His bitter smile only grew when he saw Hannibal's nostrils flare.

"Has this been a sufficient distraction from your somnambulant episode?" Hannibal asked, an edge in his voice.

"Oh yes," Will said. "Filling myself up with monstrosity that isn't my own."

"This is self-harm, Will," Hannibal said.

"I don't need your permission to do my job," Will said viciously. "I'm going to catch her. I think she returned to Baltimore because it was where she grew up. We're looking into cases of emancipated minors."

Hannibal clenched his jaw briefly. "I don't care if you catch her. I am concerned for your mental wellbeing."

Will laughed. "I've looked at plenty of murder-rapes before. I'm not so delicate that I can't do my job."

"Your job is traumatic," Hannibal said, keeping his voice steady. "You are re-traumatizing yourself, as so many people with PTSD do. Making yourself look until the violence holds no significance. Tell me: do you feel any repulsion at what the Marionette Murderer did?"

"A part of me does," Will said. "The other part has ceased to feel anything."

Hannibal's eyes narrowed. Will was nearly giddy with the ability to provoke Hannibal this way. Hannibal should be worried. He should be disgusted -- but it wasn't disgust Will felt coming from the Doctor. He was, as always, difficult to read. "What will you do with the part of yourself that is trapped within the nightmare?" Hannibal asked. "The Will who is screaming? Can you be kind to him, or is he your victim?"

"He has to watch," Will said. "And I am maneuvering. I am trying to find a way out, but my way is impeded by webs of razor wire. I am trying, Hannibal." His voice went soft. "I'm not looking for the sake of harming myself, I'm trying to move forward."

Hannibal closed his eyes, regaining his composure and plotting the next phase of the conversation. "I want you to tell me about your dream," he said. "And describe what you felt when you woke up with your hands around my neck."

Will looked down at his hands, the numbness in his mind receding to bare an aching sadness. "I was in your office," he said. "Standing by the window. It was night, and you were there."

Hannibal gestured to the window. Will hesitated, then stood, and took the position in his dreams, touching the shear drapes. "Where was I?" Hannibal asked.

Will glanced at him in the reflection on the window. "By the desk." Hannibal moved there, and Will shivered. The dream had been so vivid. It played before his eyes. "I said to you..." He took a deep breath. "'Hannibal. I can't explain it, but when I'm with you--" His voice caught, the words echoing in his head. He cleared his throat. "I feel like I'm dying."

Hannibal waited for Will to recreate the dream, the preternatural stillness he embodied when he analyzed with his full attention, like a statue, until he chose his response. Will continued. "I said, 'I'm not trying to push you away, but I can't help but feel that what we have is a terminal prognosis. I look at you and see someone I've already lost. Why? What's wrong with me?'" Will licked his lips. "Suddenly, you're right behind me."

Hannibal strode over to him, careful footsteps against the floor and carpet. Will could see his face in the reflection now, deeply shadowed eyes, looking gaunt. "And you said, 'You are transforming. You are becoming the most beautiful version of yourself.'"

Will turned around. Hannibal stood before him, not the gaunt reflection or the monster in his nightmares, but the man, primly dressed and full of curiosity. "When I turned around," Will said, voice hoarse, "You transformed into a monster and pushed me against the window, trapping me."

Hannibal took a step forward, and then another, crowding into Will's personal space. Will held his ground. "What would you actually say?" Will asked, as Hannibal placed a hand on his hip. "Why do I feel like I've already lost you? What is wrong with me?"

Hannibal pressed gently on Will's hip, guiding him until his back hit the window. Hannibal slotted his leg in between Will's, eliciting a deep thrum of pleasure. Will's heart quickened until it was jack-hammering in his chest, the fear of the nightmare present now. He tried to look away, but Hannibal put a hand on his jaw to guide his face back. His eyes were burning, his touch overwhelming, hips close, and Will began to shiver. "You are certain that you will lose me," Hannibal said in a low voice, his face close. "You have a fatalistic mindset, and see this relationship as doomed. But you also are changing, as am I. Loss as transformation, transformation as loss. Our contact is the primordial cosmic energy before the birth of a universe -- we cannot go back to how we were before." He pressed his hips closer, and Will gasped. Hannibal leaned forward, lips ghosting against Will's ear. "I can smell the fear on you."

Will clutched Hannibal's arms, shuddering. "I'm afraid of hurting you," Will said. "I don't want to, never, and it's unfathomable that I would subconsciously. Maybe I don't know myself. I'm terrified of not knowing myself."

"You must accept this side of yourself," Hannibal murmured in his ear. "You were afraid, so you fought back. It's not that you wanted to hurt me -- unless you think of me as a monster."

Will flinched. He suddenly felt trapped, the thoughts he had ignored all day rearing in him like a tsunami -- dead men on the floors of hotel rooms, the click of a winch, blood on wires, bottles, rope. Hannibal noticed him tense and put a hand on his throat, pinning him savagely against the glass; Will shoved at his shoulders and Hannibal squeezed his throat. An arrow of fear shot through him, but instead of fighting back he froze, his grip loosening, then hands falling to his sides. Hannibal squeezed the breath out of him. "Why are you so afraid of hurting me?" Hannibal asked, pulling back to watch him choke.

Strange that there was comfort in this along with the fear. When Hannibal loosened his grip, Will gasped desperately for breath. He leaned his head against the window, recovering, feeling Hannibal's handprint on his neck like a brand. "You... you've been hurt before," Will stammered, eyes fluttering. "I don't know what happened to you, but you lost control in a fundamental way, and I don't... I don't want to force you, ever."

Hannibal looked at him fondly, stroking his jaw. "You are remarkable, Will. It is impossible for me to be hurt in the way I was before. You have nothing to fear."

Will looked at him, panting, a mess of fear and want and that strange comfort of suffocation. "You're so sure... god, I want to believe you." He ran his hands up Hannibal's chest, grabbing the lapels of his suit jacket. "I don't want that to ever happen again." Will arched upward, tilting his head for a kiss, but letting Hannibal decide whether or not to give it. They touched foreheads, noses brushing, Will breathing hard not just from the strangulation; then Hannibal gave Will what he wanted, lips pressed softly together, and Will trembled, so needy but letting Hannibal control the kiss entirely. Soft kisses were placed on his lips until Will was agape and panting. Hannibal sucked on his bottom lip, so slow, teeth testing the breaking point of skin, not yet drawing blood. Will clutched his shoulders tightly, forcing himself to be still, and Hannibal licked into his open mouth, teasing his tongue until Will mirrored his movements, tips of their tongues connected, moving in slow circles. It was so much less contact than previous kisses, but intensely intimate, and Will felt his blood run southwards, each lick and suck thundering in his swiftly hardening cock.

Their mouths slotted together and they both sucked at the other's lip, Will's hardness echoing a similar response in Hannibal. Will broke away, saying, "I'm about to get desperate."

"We still have therapy," Hannibal replied. "You could come over afterwards."

"We could make it therapeutic," Will teased. "I know you've thought about it. That's a nice desk you have."

Hannibal chuckled softly. "You are the definition of temptation. If I agree to our... unconventional use of our appointment time, you must do exactly as I say. That is what you want, isn't it?"

Will swallowed, nodded, pressing their foreheads together. "Yes," he moaned, "Anything you want."

Hannibal pulled him across the room to the desk, and fetched a small plastic bottle of lubricant from a drawer. Will's anticipation was a finger sliding down a vinyl string, hearing the note before the string is plucked, knowing the vibrations would be shattering. Lately he was always so close to the edge, just inches away from breaking, a mess of nerves and mirror neurons and murder.

Hannibal's gaze was dark, lust sparked by Will's desperation and responsiveness. He pressed the bottle of lube to Will's hand, voice deadly. "Fuck me with your hands."

It felt like all the air was punched out of him, and Will was amazed that his legs didn't give out right from under him. He gaped at Hannibal, clearly shocked. "You... sure do save your expletives."

Hannibal smirked, the smug bastard. "I have gloves, if you prefer them."

Will stared dumbly at the bottle in his hands, and Hannibal removed his suit jacket, folding it neatly on the desk chair. "I... I don't know if I can," he said.

"Your suggestion for therapeutic sex has potential," Hannibal said, standing with his back to Will, and taking the other man's hands to wrap them around his hips. "You fear hurting me. You fear that your fantasies of violation will take me as subject matter."

Will leaned his head against Hannibal's back, squeezing his hip with one hand and clutching the lube with the other. "I feel safer when you're in control," he said.

"I shall be." Hannibal smirked at him from over his shoulder. "You will do exactly as I say, exactly as I like it. And I have wanted this. You, inside me."

Will gasped at his neck. "God, alright -- yes."

Hannibal folded the neck of his turtleneck once more, revealing bruised skin. He placed his hands on the desk and pushed back against Will. "You are easily convinced," he said, pleased. "Touch me through my clothing. Keep your mouth there."

Will did, kissing the bruises on the side of his neck. He placed the bottle of lube on the desk and smoothing his hands over Hannibal's naval, dipping low to stroke his cock and down his thigh. Will panted against Hannibal's neck as he felt him grow hard, tight against the fabric. Will rolled his erection minutely against Hannibal, and drew his hand up his thigh, feeling the lean muscle and swell of his ass. "You feel so good," Will whispered, biting back groans.

"Don't hide your sound," Hannibal ordered, and Will groaned openly, flushing with embarrassment. "You may remove whatever clothing you wish."

Will yanked Hannibal's shirt out of his pants and pulled it off. He could see the bruises on his neck clearly now, and it took his breath away. There was no pride in marking Hannibal that way, and he kissed his neck in repentance, Hannibal turning his head indulgently. "You don't know how sorry I am," Will said, chest tight.

"Hush," Hannibal said, shaking his head.

Will felt the skin of his back, squeezing his hips hard and then sliding to the front. He stroked the rough, silver-spun curls at his naval, one hand traveling up to do the same with his chest hair. He pulled at them lightly, experimenting, and Hannibal gasped, the first real noise he made, the sound drowned in Will's answering moan. Will thumbed open the button of his trousers and slid the zipper open carefully. His hands were trembling, already overwhelmed, tracing the shape of Hannibal's cock through his briefs. With his other hand Will shoved the trousers down Hannibal's hips, nearly coming undone when Hannibal pushed back against his erection. "God," Will whined in his neck. "I'm such a mess."

"Touch me," Hannibal instructed, voice still composed save for a slight slurring. "Trace my shape until you understand it fully, do not be shy my dear, you are doing well."

Will rested against his back, hands exploring over the soft fabric, gasping when he felt the wet patch at the tip of his jutting cock. "I can barely handle this," Will muttered, hand going low, cautiously feeling the place where Hannibal's legs met, eyes closed but seeing both of them vividly. He noticed for the first time how wide Hannibal's hips were, broad like the rest of him, a gap between his thighs. "Good, Will," Hannibal softly encouraged him, elbows on the desk now, bracing, breathing through his mouth.

Will slowly slid down Hannibal's briefs, the power difference between them momentarily staggering -- Will fully clothed, Hannibal utterly disheveled with his pants around his ankles, underwear just barely shoved down his thighs, but still in control, dictating everything. "Touch me

without lubricant first," Hannibal said. "I want you to feel the difference."

"God," Will groaned, complying. He lifted himself from Hannibal's back, spreading the cheeks of his ass with one hand. Cautiously, reverently, Will traced his thumb over his entrance, surprised at the softness. Enthralled, Will slid over the dark skin, stroking up and down and then in small circles, testing the barrier of muscle with the tip of his thumb, tight and dry, a growl in the back of Hannibal's throat making his legs weak. Will thought of worship, the unspoken words between them, dancing around the subjects of gods and death and undoing; of love and loss and the birth of stars; of ownership and violation -- and Will was desperate with the need to be subsumed by Hannibal beyond sexual desire. "Hannibal," Will gasped, but in his mind the word was *master*.

"Go on," Hannibal said. "Slowly. You won't hurt me."

Will pushed in with his thumb, shocked by the way Hannibal opened to him -- and he was inside him, all of his awareness in his thumb and the all-encompassing tight heat around him, like the whole world had zoomed in to the place their bodies merged. "God, you feel --" Will started to say, but he couldn't form the words, simply overwhelmed.

"Slick your fingers," Hannibal commanded. "Start with a single digit."

Will fumbled for the lube, suddenly feeling desperate for Hannibal to understand, unable to form the words to describe the white hot expansion in his chest, the feeling of being dwarfed, like Hannibal had the answer to a fundamental question, like he was the answer to the jumble of mixed metaphors and visuals in Will's brain. Finger slicked, Will pushed into him easily, shuddering, feeling the velvety walls. "Good boy," Hannibal growled, pressing back on his finger. "Feel me freely, do not be so cautious."

Will wasn't, anymore. He drove his finger deep, and Hannibal moaned. He chased that sound, thrusting deeply to the knuckle, withdrawing to play with his entrance, widening it, slipping in and out. "Yes, yes," Hannibal panted as Will pinched his rim. "Another now."

Will drizzled lube on his hand and fucked into Hannibal with two fingers, crying out as if he was the one being split open, Hannibal growling at the violence of it. "Yes," Hannibal encouraged, hips rolling. Will curled his fingers, searching for his prostrate. Hannibal stilled when he found the tight bundle of nerves. Will stroked at it, then retracted his fingers to thrust at that perfect angle, Hannibal trembling, Will's chest impossibly tight. He grabbed Hannibal's cock, stroking down with each thrust, the rhythm slow and addictive, falling over his back to kiss and nip at his neck, both hands wet and sticky, sliding. Hannibal tensed around him, and Will could feel it inside and out as he came, groaning Will's name.

Will just managed to remove his fingers as his legs gave out, sliding off Hannibal, controlling his descent so his back rested against the desk. Will panted hard, head lolling on his neck, utterly spent but without orgasm. Hannibal straightened and pulled up his pants, gathering his turtleneck from the desk and putting himself to rights in no time, though Will sensed his legs shaking. There was a hand on his head, Hannibal stroking his curls, guiding Will to lean against his leg. "My darling boy," Hannibal said, voice pitched low and possessive, and Will thought it was inevitable and right that Hannibal stood above him, petting his hair, that Will belonged to him completely.

That he should.

That he will.

So it was with a sense of betrayal so terrible it took his breath away that Will stood naked in his own bathroom, bloody nail clippers clenched in one hand. He had drawn Hannibal's portrait amongst a multitude of eyes in desperation to see what he couldn't, and now recreated those eyes on himself, the small gaping wounds on his hips unmistakable in their shape.

Bloody eyes echoed everywhere he looked, the surfaces of the bathroom opening up, crying red, watching him.

Chapter End Notes

I love that scene with Alana, Abigail, Will, and Hannibal. how will Hannibal manage to keep his promise?

Punishment

Chapter Summary

Hannibal discovers that Will has broken one of their rules.

Chapter Notes

thanks to Anselm_King for suggesting the type of punishment >:3

enjoy the sin. tumblr

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will planned to stay in the next day, a Saturday, calling Beverly to help narrow down the list of emancipated minors from 5-15 years ago. White, didn't go to college, owned a covered truck or SUV. Not many were in the system for anything past their emancipation.

"No one is tied to any of the crimes," Beverly said over the phone after the search had run. "But there are only seven. You'll have to come in to look at their pictures, meanwhile we're going to send officers to their homes."

An alarm rang in his head. Something wasn't right. "She doesn't have a residence," Will said, wires snapping in his mind.

"Well these cars are registered someplace."

"Send officers to those seven women," Will said, "But expand the search, eliminating the car. She might have a car that's not registered to her."

"Isn't that risky?"

"It's just a hunch. I'll come in to look at the photos."

Will looked at the faces of the seven women, passports and drivers licenses. Each face was a facade, hiding something, but none told him she was a killer. The Marionette could have been any of them. If any of the residences weren't occupied, that would be their suspect. Not that they had anything to hold a suspect to.

Will declined Jack's offer to come to the locations, saying he felt unwell. Jack gave him one of his looks, but Will must have appeared sick, because for once he didn't press the subject. Will accepted Hannibal's offer to come over to his house that evening. Couldn't keep avoiding Hannibal forever. He rested in Jack's office, catching a merciful hour of sleep. But there was no sleep without dreams:

wires, glowing with red light, laying on the ground before his bare feet; a long trail of loose lines in a dark hallway, and somewhere further ahead, echoing deep and thunderous, the click of a winch, reeling the cables in.

Will woke to the sound of his phone ringing, and answered automatically.

"We found a body," Jack said, voice full of fury, and listed one of the seven addresses. Marie Ward.

Will was immediately awake.

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Will arrived to a chaotic scene, the street blocked off, ambulances waiting behind the barricade, bomb disposal squad parked before a house. Will ran out of his car to Jack, who was all sharp fury, radio to his ear. "It was trapped," Jack snapped at Will, his distress palpable. "I've got an agent in there with half his face burned off, god knows if he's alive."

Will glanced at the other FBI agent sitting in the ambulance, the EMT clipping away the uniform burned into his arm, the smell of acid and dissolving flesh. "There's no bomb, Jack," Will said. "Send the EMTs."

"Are you fucking sure?" Jack snapped.

"Yes." Will didn't wait for his confirmation -- he ducked under the barricade and sprinted to the house, Jack barking orders behind him. The bomb squad exited the house when Will jogged up to it, one holding out their hand to halt him. She pulled up her mask and said, "Its clear, we didn't touch anything."

Will gave her a nod, and practically leaped up the stoop. The second agent was laying prone in the open doorway, an acid splash on one half of his body. He wasn't screaming, which was a bad sign. He was also caught in a wire trap. Sizzling flesh and hot metal, and deeper in the apartment, the stench of rotting flesh.

Will recreated the trap in his mind instantaneously, mind focusing to a deadly precision, and determined that there was no secondary trap mechanism. Two EMTs hurried up the steps behind him. "He has a pulse," Will said over his shoulder, withdrawing his fingers from the unburned side of his neck. "You can cut the cables but watch for recoil." Will stood up and walked further into the apartment, his whole body tingling with anticipation.

Marie Ward's body was displayed floating above the couch of her living room. She was clothed and contorted in a web of metal cable, suspended from one hook in the ceiling, spinning very slowly. The cable was not only wrapped tightly around her body, but hung in layers of loops, obscuring her, slip knots by the look of them. Her wallet was displayed on the couch beneath her, ID and passport aligned neatly at right angles. For a wild moment Will thought of Hannibal's meticulous desk.

Will circled around the body and peered through the loops, catching sight of the victim's face. It was indeed Marie Ward -- Will recognized her soft features and long blonde hair from the photos. He saw no immediate cause of death, and the formation of the bruises around the cable suggested they were post-mortem.

Anger, hot and prickling, rose swiftly in Will, and he clenched his jaw in a grimace. Now was not the time to lose himself to his emotions, not before he fully examined the scene.

Will looked. He tried to ignore the bloody eye-shaped wounds blinking at him from the walls. The metronome swung.

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"Hi, how are you? I need a drink," Will said tersely when he arrived at Hannibal's.

"Something has happened," Hannibal said, blinking away his surprise and closing the door behind Will. "What do you want to drink?"

"Whiskey," Will said, heading straight for the kitchen and collapsing on the brown leather chair in the corner. "She knew we were closing in on her, she fucking knew, and she laid a trap."

Hannibal entered the kitchen and went straight for the stash of liquor, smaller than his cabinet in the living room. "The Marionette Murderer," Hannibal said, letting Will know that he was listening as he poured the drink.

"She burned two agents with acid," Will said with a bite of anger. "One will live, but the other had burns over half of his body. Don't know if he's going to make the night."

"You're angry." Hannibal walked over and handed Will the tumbler of whiskey.

"Thank you," Will said as he accepted it. "I'm furious." He resisted throwing the two fingers of whiskey back his throat, and instead took a greedy sip. "She knew where we would look. Hannibal, she knew my profile, and I only just figured it out today! She knew before I did."

Hannibal leaned against the kitchen counter, regarding Will. "How did you find this trap?"

Will ran a hand through his hair, anger hot in his chest. "We were looking at emancipated minors from Baltimore in her age range, thinking that she's returned home. Today Beverly and I narrowed it down: white, owns a truck or SUV, no known college education. Only two were still in Baltimore, and so far we haven't heard anything from the police departments in the other states." He took another sip, watching Hannibal back. "She killed the woman and left her hanging like a fly cocooned in the spiders web. We were getting so close, and now I have no fucking idea how we're going to catch her."

"It seems that she has succeeded in taunting you," Hannibal said, though not unkindly.

"It was my profile," Will said. "My reasoning that lead us down this trail and got two agents hurt, maybe killed."

"What happened was not your fault."

Will groaned. "I know, but... the body was decomposing, I don't know how long she was dead, but it couldn't have been more than a few days. If I had just screwed my head on straight and done this

reasoning last week, none of this would have happened and Marie Ward would still be alive."

Hannibal sighed. "Do not despair, Will. You have new information that will undoubtedly help you catch her."

Will snorted. "Her kill was a clear message that we won't catch her by looking through this list of emancipated minors. Maybe I got something wrong."

"Or," Hannibal countered, "you are indeed on the right track, but she is saying that even if you identify her, she won't be caught. You have not made a mistake in your reasoning, or else she would not have left this trap."

"Even if I know her, I can't know her," Will muttered. "She's not one of the seven we narrowed down. Something is slightly different -- she doesn't have a residence, or is using a fake ID, or wasn't born in Baltimore, or doesn't have a car registered in her name. But she's definitely white, and definitely was an emancipated minor."

"When you learn more about this victim, you may discover another category that she anticipated you would use to narrow down your suspects," Hannibal said. "She likely does not fear you discovering who she is. What does that tell you?"

Will finished the whiskey, twirling the glass in his hands. "She's about to take off."

"Is that what a god would do?" Hannibal asked.

"No." Will took a calming breath, and considered. "She wants to manipulate us. She's confident that she can go undetected."

"Overconfidence is what catches killers," Hannibal said. "What would you like for dinner?"

Will smiled at him, tired. "Whatever you want. I owe you. I'll even try my best with chopsticks." Hannibal chuckled.

It was only as Hannibal began preparations for their meal, Will watching him as always, that Will noticed the vase of flowers on the kitchen island, out of place. Flowers were for the dining room centerpiece, or to be displayed in the ostentatious living room for an inviting fragrance, life amongst the skulls and horns. The vase was kintsugi, cracks of gold accentuating the flowers of white and red.

"Is that for the centerpiece?" Will asked in a hoarse voice, clearing his throat with a cough.

Hannibal paused, knife in hand. "No. They are for you."

"Not sure what I would do with flowers," Will muttered, failing to summon a grin.

Hannibal began chopping. "Do with them what you will," he said. "Toss them, take them home, leave them."

Will stood and joined Hannibal by the counter, touching the flowers gently, not able to name any of them. There were large, dark red flowers, and clusters of smaller blooms, red on white reminding

Will of eyes. "I'm sure each was selected for their significance," Will said lightly, not looking at the other man but taking comfort in the familiar sound of the knife against the cutting board.

"Indeed," Hannibal replied. "I confess that you make me a terrible romantic."

Will chuckled, heat creeping to his cheeks. "What did you select for me, Doctor Lecter?"

Hannibal flashed him a smile, small and playful. "The small white and red flowers are Sweet William, for finesse and perfection. In the Victorian Era they represented gallantry, though I selected them more for their name and the eye-pattern. They are also a culinary flower with a mild, clove-like flavor." Hannibal plucked a single flower from the cluster and tore a petal between his teeth, considering the flavor. Will watched his mouth, remembering the feeling of the other man's teeth on his skin.

"The dark red carnations are for affection and passion," Hannibal continued. "There is some debate to their etymology, but I prefer to believe the name is derived from the latin *carnis*, or *incarnacyon*."

"Flesh," Will supplied.

"God made flesh." Hannibal smirked with a brief flash of teeth. "Dianthus caryophyllus, from the myth of Diana and the shepherd. Are you familiar?"

Will closed his eyes, searching for the memory. "Diana returns from an unsuccessful hunt and blames it on a shepherd playing his music," Will said, "So she plucked out his eyes. Where the eyes fell grew red flowers."

"Innocent blood," Hannibal said, whisking together a marinade for the steaks.

"An eye for an eye," Will muttered, more to himself as he touched the flowers again. He leaned in a scented them, the smell mild. When he straightened, Will noticed Hannibal staring at him, momentarily stilled in his cooking, admiring Will sharply. Will took a step back, averting his eyes with a small blush, forcing down the familiar prickle of shame. "Freddie Lounds published the photo of her gory surrogate," Will said, trying to divert Hannibal's attention. "Made quite the sensation out of her serial-killing admirer. 'The threats of murderers has not stopped me from writing before, though I have to give this one credit for his creativity.'"

"I saw," Hannibal replied, returning to the food.

Will snorted, imagining Hannibal browsing Tattle Crime on his ipad. "Did you read my interview?"

"Of course," Hannibal said, a note of displeasure. "I wanted to know the extent of her... trespasses. Though I do not think she will blackmail us again."

"Oh?"

Hannibal picked up the remaining bud of sweet william, one petal missing, and plopped it in his mouth, savoring. "There are sharks in the water, now."

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After dinner, Hannibal invited Will to his bedroom, his intentions transparent to the profiler: sweet, unhurried sex, making up for lost touches and the need to comfort Will, to make him feel safe in the bed once again. Will had other plans. He didn't want comfort. He took a single chrysanthemum with them, pouring himself more whiskey as well.

Over the past days Will had methodically hurt himself without Hannibal's permission, and lied to him about it. So it was not with a warm flush of aroused anticipation that Will entered the bedroom, but with a cold dread that made him nauseous. Hannibal took the blood red flower and tumbler from Will's hands, a deliberate brushing of fingers, and set them on the bedside table. He took Will into his strong arms and kissed him softly on the lips; gestures that should have Will melt into him, but tonight he tensed. Sensing his apprehension but not understanding the source of it, Hannibal kissed him gently, hands soothing up his arms and down his back. Hannibal kissed his neck, slow and wet, building pleasure with the patience of a saint. Will couldn't help but relax some as Hannibal sucked gently on his ear, but the affection made him sick. Will let Hannibal kiss him, unable to move forward or pull back, tried to enjoy it.

Hannibal sat on the bed and pulled Will onto his lap, a low hum in his throat. Will opened his mouth to the kiss, encouraging Hannibal with small, purposeful sounds, hands indecisive. Hannibal sucked at his lip, drawing a soft moan. He thumbed open the first buttons of Will's shirt, looking into his eyes for a sign of permission. Will nodded, biting his lip, trepidation apparent, and helped Hannibal remove his shirt. It was tossed on the floor, and Hannibal kissed his way slowly down Will's neck, across his collar, biting so softly against his shoulder. Will fisted his hands in Hannibal's suit, not pulling him in or pushing away, and Hannibal's mouth went lower, breathing in his heart beat, licking and sucking at a nipple until it peaked, soothing the sensitive nub with the flat of his tongue.

Despite his anxiety, Will was getting hard. Hannibal payed his attentions to his other nipple, hands firm on his hip and lower back, sliding lower, underneath the band of Will's pants. Will gasped, then clenched his teeth, nearly knocking his head against Hannibal's as he held him tightly. "Hush," Hannibal soothed, bending his fingers so nails lightly scratched Will's skin. "Let me take care of you."

Will chuckled, a sad sound, breath hitching. He climbed off Hannibal's lap and stood up, turning his back, and Hannibal let him, wouldn't press him, would wait patiently. Will shuddered, fumbling at the button of his pants. "I'm sorry," Will said, hearing his own voice as if from a distance, sensing Hannibal's confusion as Will stripped down, stepping out of his pants and boxers, still turned away. Will glanced down at the marks on his hips and the top of his thighs, some scabbed and dark, others the tender pink of new scar tissue. Will took a deep breath, gathering his courage, and turned to face Hannibal.

Hannibal sat on the edge of the bed, fully clothed and half-erect, looking at Will's face with confusion -- and then his gaze snapped to the wounds on his hips and Hannibal *changed*. Like a mask slipping away. Will felt suddenly afraid, his heart rate sky-rocketing as Hannibal stiffened and planted his feet firmly on the ground, still seated but ready to pounce, eyes dark. "You disobeyed me," Hannibal said in an icy calm voice belayed by fury Will could feel raging under the surface. Hannibal's eyes were black slits. "You *lied*."

Will took a step back, raising his hands. "Yes," he admitted. "I'm sorry."

Hannibal stood up and was in front of Will in two strides, catching his wrists in hand as Will raised them to protect himself. His hold was firm but not violent, yet Will felt shockingly unsafe, every instinct screaming at him that there was danger here -- run. "I told you explicitly not to lie," Hannibal said in a low voice, eyes tracking Will's. He backed Will up against the wall slowly, unhurried. "Why did you do this to me?" Hannibal asked.

To me. Will turned his face away. "You know why."

Hannibal laughed quietly. "I have my theories. I want to hear you say it."

Will swallowed, failing to keep the pain from twisting his face. "You won't punish me for what I did unconsciously," he said, breath stuttering.

"You need my condemnation," Hannibal said, gently pinning his hands on either side of his head, applying pressure, leaning close. "But if you merely wished to assuage your guilt, you would have asked it of me."

Will clamped down on a whimper, eyes shut tight. "I hurt you."

"Oh, but I was not angry, nor afraid." He leaned close, whispering in Will's ear. "So you betrayed me."

Will sobbed once, leaning his head away, but Hannibal pressed their cheeks together, the brush of contact a deceptively gentle threat. "You push me away," Hannibal breathed. "So afraid of hurting me, more terrified by my acceptance."

"You don't understand," Will gasped out. "I'm not safe. Not for you. Not for me."

"You've hurt me, Will," Hannibal said. "Terribly. I can't trust you."

"You can't!" Will snapped. "That's the fucking point! I can't trust --"

"Language," Hannibal growled, cutting through Will's words. His hands were suddenly in Will's hair, twisting hard enough to make him scream, and Hannibal forced him to his knees. Will hit the floor hard, scalp burning, whimpering, Hannibal's grip relentless.

"I'm sorry!" Will cried out, and Hannibal shook his head once, hard.

"Do not speak," Hannibal commanded, forcing his voice to be level, but Will heard the fury in it. "You will only speak when spoken to. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Will gasped, tears pricking his eyes.

"Ingenious, infuriating boy," Hannibal said, twisting his dark curls. "I cannot entirely predict you. Every boundary I set, you will test, forcing our arrangements into unsafe contortions because *you* do not trust *me*." He pulled up on Will's hair until he cried out again. "Words are insufficient. I must ensure that you will not lie to me again."

Danger, Will's mind screamed, *run*. He forced himself to sit and not flee or fight, his fists white-knuckled against his thighs. Hannibal adjusted his grip on his hair, and Will let him, didn't so much as move his head an inch. Hannibal gripped hard -- and then he dragged Will by the hair, the pain blinding white, his scream deafening, and threw him on the bed.

Will hit the mattress, stunned, the skin from his scalp to his shoulders throbbing. "On your stomach, feet off the bed," Hannibal said in a terrifyingly calm voice. It took Will a moment, fear flooding every sense and halting his thoughts, but he complied, twitching and breathing erratically. Hannibal moved about the room, retrieving his antique medical bag and loosening his tie. Will pressed his face into the duvet.

Hannibal took his jaw and forced Will's face up, and though his eyes were watering and unsteady he tried to look at Hannibal, to communicate wordlessly his regret and shame. Hannibal was utterly detached. That was worse than anger -- the fury was there, and Will wanted Hannibal to unleash it, he deserved to be its recipient; instead, Hannibal was clinical and uncaring, clasping the collar around Will's neck and clipping a leash to the ring. Hannibal arranged Will to his purpose, cuffing his hands behind his back and tying his ankles together with the end of the leash. Hannibal stood on the side of the bed near Will's feet, removing his jacket and vest, and rolling up his sleeves.

"This will hurt," Hannibal said, and Will laughed desperately into the bed. Good. He deserved it.

Will felt a cold, metal rod rest against the soles of his feet, and it took every ounce of self-control to stay still as realization flooded him.

Hannibal clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth and brought the metal rod down.

Will cried out in pain as his feet were struck, legs bending in reflex, but Hannibal held his feet steady with the loop of the leash, clicking his tongue again, the sound crystal clear. He struck Will again, hard, not warming up at all, the metal spacer long enough to give good leverage. Will barked into the bed, shoulders seizing up. Hannibal waited for the cry of pain to cease before clicking his tongue again, Will already bracing for pain he knew was coming. He was being trained. Hannibal hit him again. His toes curled, red welts blossoming on his skin. And again, and again, always with the clear click of Hannibal's tongue, alternating sharper impact to the bottom of his heels and pad of his toes, always precise, the tender skin close to splitting; and Will screamed into the bed, enraged with himself, white hot fury and shame, so much shame.

"I'm sorry!" Will screamed, voice muffled. "God I'm so sorry, so fucking sorry--"

Hannibal grabbed the leash and yanked Will's head back, choking him. "You may be sorry," Hannibal hissed, "but you are not repentant. Not yet."

Will tried to scream, the sound rasping and burning in his throat. Hannibal pulled back on the leash, the hard leather of the collar cutting into Will's neck and making him completely breathless. He spluttered, truly choking, back arched and shoulders lifted from the bed with the strength of Hannibal's grip. Hannibal released him and Will hit the mattress, wheezing. "You will not lie to me again," Hannibal said, clicking his tongue. He scratched into the soles of Will's feet, breaking the tender skin, and Will shrieked. Hannibal raised his fingers to his mouth and lapped at the few droplets of blood, hardly sated.

There was little enjoyment in this for Hannibal, having shut away his emotions and desires by

necessity when Will showed him the marks of his betrayal. How furious those wounds had made him, how Hannibal wanted to flay that skin bloody so no trace remained, covering the cuts with scars of his own making. He had clamped down on those feelings, recognizing jealousy for what it was -- a sign of his attachment to Will. But it was not so terribly difficult to turn off those feelings.

Will would suffer. He would repent.

And Hannibal's plans for him would continue.

Hannibal smacked Will's tender feet until his screams grew weak and the muscles in his legs gave out. Will was sobbing for breath, face turned, soaked in sweat, shivering with pain. Hannibal sat on the edge of the bed and took Will's feet into his lap, the other man twisted on his side. Hannibal stroked the abused soles, observing Will whimpering. The skin was bloody and inflamed, hot under his fingers. "Can you speak?" Hannibal asked.

Will tried to, moaning. "Yes," he eventually whispered.

"Is there something you wish to say to me?" Hannibal asked.

Will's eyes fluttered open, looking at Hannibal, finding no openness in his face. "Never," Will panted. "Never again. I promise."

Hannibal clicked his tongue, and Will winced in pain as if he had been struck again. "Do not make promises you cannot keep, my dear."

"Never," Will gasped, pleading for Hannibal to understand, his voice weak. "Please, I -- I tried. Can you forgive me?"

Hannibal stroked his ankles, easily moving from a cruel touch to a tender one. "You will have to work hard to regain my trust."

"I know." Will reached out his hand, quiet desperation plain on his features. "Please let me. Take everything, anything you want from me. I'm yours."

Hannibal looked at him, seemingly unmoved, not reaching for his hand.

Will's eyes shone wet and his breath hitched, drawing on a desperate reserve of strength. "Don't leave me," he hissed.

Hannibal breathed deep the smell of fear, sweat, and blood, and grasped Will's hand, who squeezed tightly. "I will not," Hannibal said, and Will's eyes closed in pained relief at the words. "It is too late for that. We are entwined, you and I -- the only way is forward."

"Thank you," Will said weakly, resting his head back on the bed. "Don't... don't let me hurt you."

Hannibal smiled, the expression slow to blossom but more genuine than Hannibal had displayed in a long time, deadly and immensely satisfied. He was a man of his word, and so he said nothing.

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Hannibal bandaged Will's feet and sat him up on the bed to drink water. "Your punishment is complete," Hannibal said, touching the eye-shaped wounds on his hips and upper thighs. "Time will tell if your repentance is." Will was too exhausted, emotionally and physically, to respond or put two thoughts together. Hannibal carried him to the bathroom and sat him on the counter, cleaning off his sweat with a damp towel and helping Will brush his teeth. He gave Will a sedative, and Will passed out as soon as his back hit the mattress.

He didn't dream.

Will woke groggily at 10:40am, mildly astonished that he had slept so long, but mostly grateful that he had slept the whole night through. He was alone in Hannibal's bedroom, the other man no doubt up and about downstairs. It was a Saturday, and Will had no obligations save grading papers and writing up his account of yesterday's crime scene. Will wondered if the agent had survived the night. He swung his legs out of bed, finding a pair of slippers waiting for him. He slid into them, wincing as his bandaged feet took his weight. The lesions had begun to heal in the night but ached terribly nonetheless, and he limped with each step.

Will's clothes from last night were put away, but he did not find his cell on the bedside table or anywhere else in the room. Will pulled on a pair of underwear and his robe, frowning. Hannibal had taken his phone.

Will glanced at the bedside table, where the red carnation still lay, though his glass of whiskey from last night was gone. The flower was out of place. He imagined the flower wilting, petals drying and falling to the floor. Would Hannibal leave it there to rot? He had said the flowers were for Will to do with as he pleased, and the thought of the single carnation dying next to the bed filled Will with appropriate melancholy. Red for affection and passion. Red for blood.

Will limped down the stairs and found Hannibal sitting in the kitchen, fully dressed. Breakfast was already cooked, pots covered and stove off, the smell of eggs and bacon filling the room. "Good morning Will," Hannibal said cheerfully, looking up from his ipad, coffee glass empty on the counter.

"Morning." Will hesitated by the doorway. The vase of flowers was exactly where they had left it last night. He cleared his throat and walked forward, slowly, Hannibal watching his sensitive gait.

"How did you sleep?" Hannibal asked.

"Like the dead." Will sat in the stool opposite from Hannibal, groaning in relief as the weight came off his feet. He looked at Hannibal. "How are you?"

Hannibal tilted his head, considering the question with a flick of his tongue. "I am fine, Will," Hannibal said, not dismissive but earnest.

Will looked at him sadly, an anxious smile flitting across his face. "Are we?"

"Yes," Hannibal said firmly, then stood from his stool, going to make Will an espresso. "I was rather hard on you last night," Hannibal said lightly, scooping the ground espresso into the portafilter and tamping it. "You succeeded in forcing my hand."

Will frowned. "I'd rather have your wrath than your indifference."

Hannibal pulled the handle on the espresso machine, glancing over at Will curiously. "And I do not wish for my emotions to disturb my judgement," Hannibal replied, "Lest I risk hurting you."

Will smirked. "I'm sure I'll be feeling your hurt for days. It was deserved. I betrayed your trust." He accepted the glass of espresso. "Thank you."

Hannibal's fingers lingered on his own for a moment, drawing away slowly, and he sat again. "Although misguided, you deceived me in an attempt to protect me."

Will sipped his coffee. "Can't get rid of you that easy."

Hannibal smiled. "Indeed."

"Is there anything I can do to... to make up for this?"

Hannibal admired Will mischievously. "Your indulgence," he said, voice molten gold. "And of course, as much as you can, your obedience."

Will smiled, though he still felt brittle and self-conscious. "However you like me, Doctor Lecter."

Hannibal served them breakfast at the counter and Will ate ravenously -- eggs, thick slices of bacon, freshly baked rolls, fried tomatoes. Something simple, for Will. It reminded him of the protein scramble from back in Minnesota.

"Can I have my phone?" Will asked.

Hannibal fished it out of his pocket and handed it over. "You needed your rest," He explained. "Jack called once, but only once, so I expect it's not an emergency."

Will swallowed down his food and looked at the voicemail notification with a pang of dread. Probably about the acid-burned agent. "Do you mind?" Will asked, and Hannibal gave a nod of indulgence.

Will turned slightly in his stool and listened to the voicemail. He sighed, and placed the phone back on the counter. "Agent Vargas died early this morning," Will said numbly. "There will be more traps."

"How to find them without springing them?" Hannibal inquired.

Will smirked. "Follow the lure. If she wants to catch more law enforcement, she'll lead us to her traps again. No unsuspecting civilian stumbling upon a bloody puppet show."

"Follow the trail," Hannibal said. "But be careful where you step."

Will sighed, returning to the food. "Pretty sure I'm going to be stepping carefully all week."

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"Good evening, Alana."

Later that afternoon, Hannibal greeted his colleague with a smile, opening his door for her. "Please come in."

"Thank you," Alana said, returning the smile and, stepping inside. "It's good to see you." She allowed Hannibal to take her coat, and joined him in the kitchen. "I appreciate you having me over. I wanted to check in about Abigail."

Hannibal poured her special beer with a flourish. "Have you seen her since our visit?" Hannibal asked. He passed Alana the glass, and she accepted it with a nod.

"Yes, and she's much the same. Quite enamored with that book you leant her," Alana said, taking a sip of dark beer. "Mmmm. Just what I needed."

Hannibal poured himself a glass of wine. "Have you come to admonish me for teaching Abigail about human sacrifice?" Hannibal teased.

"Oh, I think Abigail knows about human sacrifice."

"As do we," Hannibal said, raising his glass briefly.

Alana leaned against the kitchen island, examining the flowers as she enjoyed her beer. "No, I wanted to talk about her escapades. If you know where she goes when she hops the walls of the institute..." She paused mid-sip, eyes going wide, and set the glass on the counter. "These are nice," she said, a note of bitterness in her voice, leveling a look at Hannibal. "What's the occasion?"

Hannibal paused. Swallowed. Clever girl. He set his wineglass down and smoothed his hand down his stomach. "They were for a guest," Hannibal replied, looking at the carnations and sweet williams. "Do you recognize the flora?"

Alana's mouth twitched. "I do," she replied slowly.

Hannibal caressed the bloom of sweet william, red irises on white petals. "They're a beautiful color, aren't they?"

"Hannibal." Alana's voice was low and dark.

He finally looked at her, noting how plainly she wore her displeasure, a sharp and quiet look of anger. "I won't do you the disrespect of lying to you," Hannibal said evenly. "My guest was Will."

"Unbelievable." Her jaw clenched. "Hannibal -- that is *unfathomably* irresponsible!"

"Alana--" Hannibal said, trying to placate.

"Will is your patient!" Alana said accusingly, glaring daggers. "Will needs a psychiatrist he can trust -- we *all* need to be able to trust his therapist!"

"I know what Will needs," Hannibal replied, a sharp edge slipping into his voice.

She stared at him, open mouthed. "I can't believe you. This is completely unacceptable -- how *could* you?"

"Will was never technically my patient."

Alana laughed savagely. "Oh, how convenient for you!" she snapped. "You cannot be objective if you are involved with Will Graham. This cannot continue."

Hannibal clenched his jaw, a brief display of annoyance. "There is no therapist that Will can trust who is also objective about him. You have said yourself that your professional curiosity and personal feelings have kept you from being his therapist."

"At least I'm not sleeping with him." Eyes, cold as daggers.

A twinge of anger and amusement. "Do I detect a hint of regret?"

"Don't you dare," Alana said in a low voice. "Don't turn this on me. I did the right thing. Will is unstable."

"You made your choice. As did I. Contrary to what you may believe, I have always acted in Will's best interest."

"You cannot claim that," Alana said with a shake of her head. "Hannibal, this cannot stand. It is not ethical. Technicalities be damned, Will needs a therapist who is not a romantic partner. I can't believe I have to spell this out for you."

Hannibal paused, wetting his lips. "You do not need to spell it out for me. I am well aware of our unusual circumstances and the inherent risks."

"Will needs a new therapist," Alana said firmly. "Or you need to break up with him."

Hannibal took up his glass again and turned from Alana, sipping the wine. "I do not take kindly to being threatened in my own kitchen, Alana."

"For gods sake, Hannibal," Alana said with exasperation. "I'm not threatening you. I am stating the facts."

"Will you tell Jack?" Hannibal asked.

Alana sighed, some of the anger leaving her voice. "If you don't, then yes. You obviously care deeply for Will. I care about him as well. And we both know that this is an incredibly stressful time for him -- he needs a support system."

"Is this the part where you say, 'if you truly cared for him, you would let him go?'" Hannibal turned back to Alana, face a mask -- but there was kindness in her expression along with all the fury and disappointment.

"This is the part where I remind you that you are not infallible," Alana said softly. "And that you cannot perfectly separate your desires from what is best for Will."

Chapter End Notes

I was originally going to have Abigail dig up Nicholas Boyle's body in this chapter, but there were WAY too many plot things going on. she might not in this story, i'm still mulling it over.

Devourer

Chapter Summary

"If you give yourself to me, I will cut and polish you to a perfect plane of glass, all darkness yet aflame with light."

"You're waxing poetic," Will said, rolling his eyes. "A mirror has no inherent qualities -- that's not me. Underneath all these reflections, I am my own person."

"I know. You could wield the mirror instead of being beholden to it."

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Alana has found out, and Will wonders why Hannibal is being reasonable.

Chapter Notes

travel messed up my update schedule! sorry. see you friday and enjoy the sin <3

tumblr

"There is something we need to discuss," Hannibal said over the phone. "Can I tempt you back to my house, or shall I join you in Wolf Trap?"

Will scrubbed his face, looking around at his cluttered, dog-strewn abode. It was early evening and the sun had just set, the lone lamp above the fly lures doing little to illuminate the dim house. "If you don't mind a bit of mess, I don't think I'm up for the drive."

"I don't mind at all."

"I'll make you dinner this time," Will said, smiling, and heard a note of pleasure on the other line.

"Perfect, I'll see you soon."

Will drove to town for groceries, and returned with just enough time to tidy up before he began dinner. He brushed down the dogs and swept up the dog hair, turning on the space heater since the chimney was still gutted. He showered and dressed comfortably in a worn pair of jeans and grey sweater, both cleaned of dog-hair, everything else be damned.

He hadn't spent much of the day on his feet, and whenever he did he was reminded of Hannibal's quiet fury and the sharp sting of the metal rod. His feet throbbed in protest as he busied around the house, but he didn't mind it. The pain was deserved, and grounded him in reality when his mind threatened to drag him down into fantasies. Will had broken Hannibal's trust, one of the few hard

rules they had, and now Hannibal would be more cautious with him. And Will knew that he wouldn't lie again.

The pain was his and Hannibal's, and as the arch of his feet screamed as if the skin was tearing to pieces, Will felt like Hannibal was sharing his psychic pain as well as dealing out the physical.

Will wasn't much of a cook, and nothing could compare to Hannibal's cooking, but he knew how to make Louisiana gumbo. There was almost nothing that could go wrong, as long as he didn't burn the roux -- which he nearly did twice as his mind wandered while he whisked. Soon the large pot was simmering with the okra, onion, green pepper, sausage and shrimp, everything going in at once for convenience despite the fact that the vegetables would probably be slightly overcooked.

The barking of dogs signaled Hannibal's arrival, so Will uncorked the wine. "Settle down, everyone," Will said to the dogs, shooing them out of the way as he approached the door to answer Hannibal's knock. "Sit, Zoe."

Will opened the door and greeted Hannibal with a smile. Beneath his winter coat he was dressed down in grey slacks and a red sweater over a white dress shirt. Hannibal smiled back, nostrils flaring as he took in the scents emanating from the kitchen. Before he could say anything, Will stepped forward, placed his hands on his shoulders, and kissed him. "Hey," Will breathed, blushing slightly and letting go. "Come on in."

He took Hannibal's coat and hung it up while the dogs sniffed Hannibal's outstretched hand. Hannibal scratched behind Buster's ears, and Will's heart flipped. "What are you cooking?" Hannibal asked casually.

"Guess," Will said with a smirk. He corralled the dogs back to their beds by the space heater, walking slightly slower than normal, and sat on the arm of the couch.

"It's a rather distinctive spice and flavor combination," Hannibal replied, eyes on Will, noting with satisfaction how the way he moved spoke of the injuries to his feet. "Not much of a challenge for my olfactory sense. Gumbo."

"I hope you'll like it," Will said.

Hannibal approached him, touching his arm gently. "I'm sure I will. Are you in pain?"

Will looked up at Hannibal, chin tilted defiantly, parting his legs just enough so Hannibal could slip closer if he wanted. "It's not so bad," he said, "I've just been on my feet for a while getting ready."

Hannibal did slide closer, and their thighs brushed. "I will take a look after our dinner," he replied, stroking the soft curls at the nape of Will's neck. "It was my intention to provide a long ache, not to hinder your movements."

Will quirked an eyebrow. "I'm not hindered. I'm just on my feet a lot."

"We can find reason to keep you off your feet," Hannibal murmured in a dangerously low voice, leaning in.

Will laughed, turning his head to avoid Hannibal's kiss -- but he put his hands on the other man's waist and held him firmly. Eyes flickering up through dark lashes, Will muttered, "You don't have to pretend to like my dogs."

Hannibal paused, lips parting. "Am I that transparent?"

"Yes."

"You enjoyed it."

"Yes. But I won't pretend to enjoy opera," Will countered.

Hannibal brushed his lips across Will's forehead and Will sighed, straightening up as he pulled Hannibal down, their mouths nearly touching now, his arms sliding up Hannibal's strong back. This was the same need to comfort from last night, delayed by Will's punishment, and Will didn't question it. "You haven't ever been to the opera--" Hannibal started to say, but Will kissed him. They clutched each other closer, humming in mutual pleasure. Will opened his mouth to taste and Hannibal did the same, slotting together to suck and nip. How could kissing Hannibal be this erotic? The taste of him sent pulses of pleasure down Will's body and he groaned, flicking his tongue across sharp teeth. Hannibal caught his tongue between teeth and pulled, making Will gasp.

"Ah, the, um. Food." Will stuttered with a blush, tilting his head away from Hannibal's covetous mouth.

"Very well," Hannibal growled, snatching a brief kiss before stepping back.

Flushed, Will stood and entered the kitchen, Hannibal strolling languidly behind him. "Would you pour the wine?" Will asked, gesturing to the open bottle on the counter. He stood over the stove and lifted the lid to inhale the hearty gumbo, stirring it and bringing the wooden spoon to his lips. Not too bad.

Will twitched as Hannibal's hands took his hips, the other man sliding up behind Will and ducking his head into the crook of his neck. "I rather like the sight of you cooking," Hannibal murmured, kissing Will's neck.

"Oh?" Will shuddered, trapped between Hannibal and the stove.

"Mmm." Hannibal pushed his sweater up slightly to skim his fingers over the skin above his jeans, thumbs digging into the knotted flesh of his lower back. "You're cooking for me."

"I -- I wanted to."

Hannibal breathed against Will's neck. "The food looks ready," he said with some reluctance, and he didn't draw back.

Will turned off the burner, and tilted his head back, giving Hannibal better access to his neck. "It will keep," Will said. "We can always eat later."

Hannibal's lips ghosted over Will's neck, hands squeezing his hips once before relaxing -- and Will thought about how Hannibal could pin him over the counter and let the food get cold. Hannibal sighed regretfully, and Will frowned at the noise. "No, let us eat," Hannibal said, kissing Will's neck and stepped away.

Anxiety blossomed in Will's chest. He took a deep breath and busied himself with plating their dinner while Hannibal set the small table and poured the wine. When Will served the food,

Hannibal leaned forward just slightly the scent the gumbo, smiling in pleasure. "This smells delicious, Will."

"Thanks." Will sat across from Hannibal and took a sip of wine. It helped somewhat with the nerves. Hannibal needed to discuss something with him, but Will hadn't expected anything serious since they parted in good terms this morning. If anything, Will thought Hannibal had come to some decision regarding the rules of their arrangement. An adjustment. He watched as Hannibal took a bite, eyes fluttering shut with pleasure.

"This is quite good," Hannibal said, "And perfect for the cold weather."

Will took a bite. It was good -- probably not his best gumbo, but then again he liked it best the day after, when everything was totally saturated with the flavors. "Some of your skills must have rubbed off on me," Will said dismissively. "I only nearly burned the roux twice."

Hannibal chuckled. "Did your father cook this for you?"

Will pulled a face. "Oh, never. My dad's idea of gumbo was indistinguishable from chili. Lots of canned food in a pot. Sometimes neighbors would take pity on us and I learned from them. Don't get any ideas though -- this is one of only three meals I can actually cook."

"I look forward to the other two."

Will was quiet. He ate, and drank down his wine, not looking at Hannibal. Will stood to pour them both more wine, the low-grade anxiety squeezing his stomach. Did Hannibal simply want to talk about an adjustment to their relationship? It wasn't like either of them to make small talk. Winston came over to investigate the food, and Will pointed at him, ordering firmly, "Go to bed." Winston retreated.

"You have them well trained," Hannibal said.

Will didn't respond to that small talk either. "What do we need to discuss, Hannibal?" he said before he could stop himself.

Hannibal set down his utensils and patted his mouth with the napkin. "I had thought we would talk after dinner," he said.

"That only makes me nervous." Will glanced up. Hannibal was looking aside, a note of regret only apparent to Will from his meticulous study of the other man's micro-expressions. Will had not experienced this countenance before, and his mind rang with warning alarms.

"I did not wish to spoil a delicious meal with poorly-paired conversation," Hannibal said cautiously.

Will sighed, nearly wincing. "Make that very nervous."

"Very well," Hannibal said, folding his hands on his lap and looking back at Will. His gaze was steady and guarded. "Alana knows about us."

A dog yawned from the other room. The two men sat in still silence, Hannibal waiting for Will's reaction, and Will -- blank, mind emptied violently as if a trap door had opened, dropping the tangled web of his thoughts out of his body. Will blinked. Moved to adjust the glasses on his face, but they weren't there. Tendrils of thought claimed his attention -- Jack's fury -- Hannibal was

breaking up with him -- he shouldn't be consulting on cases but Jack wouldn't care, unless he knew, Jack couldn't know about the self-harm, the violent fantasies -- which psychiatrist would they send him to next?

"How?" Will stuttered. "How did she find out?"

"I'm afraid it's my fault," Hannibal said. "Alana visited me this afternoon to discuss Abigail, and she noticed the flowers."

Will scrubbed his face, and then grabbed his wine. "She suspected, when we visited Abigail."

"I apologize, Will. I know you did not wish for anyone to find out yet."

Will took a deep drink from the wine glass. "God." He hid his face with one hand. "What did she say?"

Hannibal took a steadying breath, choosing his words carefully. "She impressed upon me what I already knew -- that our arrangement is not stable, or entirely fair to you."

"Fuck that," Will snarled, leveling an accusatory stare at Hannibal. Hannibal frowned at his language, his stern look a warning. "We don't have to change anything," Will went on. "Jack will be furious, and he won't trust your judgement, but that doesn't matter -- he'll keep me on the cases, no matter what. Even if he knew everything." Will grinned. "But Jack will refuse to know everything -- plausible deniability for when the FBI is done chewing on me and spits me out."

"Do you imagine Jack's ignorance will save him if he finally pushes you too far?" Hannibal asked.

Will narrowed his eyes. "You certainly wouldn't be safe from condemnation. Are you finally worried about your career?"

For a moment, Hannibal looked angry -- disappointed that Will would accuse him of such. But then he said, "Is there any sense in jeopardizing my career? Will -- you can not remain my patient."

Will's heart seized. Rejection was swiftly pushed away by anger. "What happened to 'we're just having conversations'?"

"We are not," Hannibal said sharply. "We are intimately involved."

Will laughed. "No shit."

Hannibal clicked his tongue, and Will winced, the phantom memory of pain striking vividly. "It is in both of our best interests," Hannibal said, voice infuriatingly calm.

"How can you say that?" Will snapped. "I can't talk to anyone else about this, they wouldn't understand. They would put me on medication, put me in the hospital -- I'm not fucking going to an institution Hannibal!"

Hannibal clicked his tongue again, and Will twitched. "Would you stop that?" he exclaimed.

"Mind your language at the dinner table," Hannibal replied.

Will rolled his eyes. "Yes, *master*."

"You are not going to an institution," Hannibal said, keeping his voice calm. "I would not allow that to happen. *We* will not let that happen."

Will looked away, frustrated. "How are you going to prevent that after you've dumped me as your patient?" he accused.

"I am not leaving you."

"You are!" Will clenched his jaw. "You can't protect me if I'm in another doctor's care. It would be official, this time, it has to be."

"We will continue to have our conversations. I will continue to help you manage your trauma."

Will looked up at him, eyes widening. "You've already decided."

"What would you have me do, Will?" Hannibal asked with a note of frustration. "What other option have you gleaned that I have not already considered?"

"What were you going to do if this didn't happen?" Will shot back. "What was the plan, Hannibal? Or were we going to keep our relationship secret forever?"

"I had hoped that when you are on firmer ground we would make our relationship public."

"Firmer ground," Will repeated bitterly. "When I don't need a therapist so badly -- when you've finally gotten in my head and. And *fixed* me."

Hannibal sighed. "You're not broken, Will," he said in a soft voice. "We are working through your trauma, and as is inevitable, bringing to light difficult feelings and maladaptive coping mechanisms."

Will pushed up from the table, frustrated with Hannibal's stillness and better-than-thou calm, needing to move. His feet stung, but he stood by the window anyway, looking out at the night. "You thought you could manage this," he said. "And Alana reminded you that you can't."

"Alana reminded me that managing our relationship may conflict with what is best for your mental health. Although I believe our relationship is beneficial to your mental health, I am not infallible." Hannibal stood, and joined Will by the window, a step behind him. "There is an inherent power imbalance in our relationship, and we should not deny it. It will be good to have another watch out for your wellbeing, Will."

Everything Hannibal was saying made sense and was reasonable, but Will couldn't align it with his image of Hannibal -- especially the man from last night who had growled possessively into his skin and flayed his feet raw for lying. Hannibal hadn't been reasonable before, or at least, not like he was now, or else they would have never entered into their current arrangement. Hannibal thought he could master his feelings for Will and his appraisal of his mental state as two separate entities. Did Alana say something to make Hannibal doubt his abilities to draw those distinctions? Or was he just covering for himself?

No -- Alana hadn't brought anything new to the table. Nothing had changed. They had always been playing with an unethical power dynamic, a game that would perhaps be less dangerous if Will wasn't so unwell. Whether as his therapist or his friend or his lover, Hannibal wanted what was best

for Will. What Hannibal *thought* was best. This was not realizing a miscalculation in their relationship -- Hannibal truly thought it was best for Will to see another therapist.

But why the fuck did he think that?

"Do you want to control me?" Will asked.

Hannibal took a tentative step forward. He placed his hands gently on Will's waist, and ducked his head to nose behind Will's ear, close and gently possessive. "Yes," he whispered, and the word sent a chill down Will's spine. "I want to know everything about you. I want everything you have to give. The fantasy of your... subservience... is uniquely thrilling." Hannibal inhaled sharply through his nose, scenting him. "But beyond the desire to own you, in every sense of the word, is my need to set you free. To see the weight lifted from your shoulders. To witness you become wholly yourself, fully in your element -- you would be magnificent, Will, you would be glorious. There is nothing I wouldn't do for you."

Will leaned back against him, the low thrum of his passionate words resonating inside, echoing a desire he couldn't name. To be free, to fully know himself and embrace what he was -- whatever that was. *You are becoming the most beautiful version of yourself.* "Your need for control is near pathological," Will said, turning his head so Hannibal's lips were against his jaw. "But if you mean what you say, then you know that you have to cede control in order to see me transform."

"I know," Hannibal said against his skin, brushing rough stubble. "If you give yourself to me, I will cut and polish you to a perfect plane of glass, all darkness yet aflame with light."

"You're waxing poetic," Will said, rolling his eyes. "A mirror has no inherent qualities -- that's not me. Underneath all these reflections, I am my own person."

"I know. You could wield the mirror instead of being beholden to it." Hannibal's gaze found Will in the dim reflection on the window, intense and exultant, and Will wondered if he hadn't got everything reversed -- if Hannibal was worshipping *him*, if Hannibal was the one leading Will down into the underworld with silken promises. Will glanced away. It was too much. He wanted Hannibal, wanted him on his knees, wanted to shatter that perfect control, hands in his hair, biting his lips bloody. When he was free. When he had come into his power.

"What are we going to do?" Will asked, burying the fantasy and the honeyed words.

Hannibal kissed his neck, brief and comforting. "Alana has offered to take over your care. You do not need to speak to her about everything, but I hope you will let her give you support."

Will turned around, resting his hands on Hannibal's shoulders. "You really are dumping me."

Hannibal's lips quirked. "Only technically. Only as Jack's oft-ignored voice of reason."

Will shook his head, smiling ruefully. "Alana really agreed to that? She's not exactly neutral regarding me."

"You need to see someone with whom you have a personal connection," Hannibal explained. "Do you not, to some degree, trust Alana?"

"I suppose." Will shifted his feet, wincing slightly. "I don't like this, Hannibal."

"I know." Hannibal pulled him close, and god only knew how Will felt so comforted by his embrace, strong arms that routinely caused him pain then soothed the wounds, drew pleasure from his body so intense it made him dizzy, a confounding and undeniable magnetism between them -- and beneath it all, an unnamed disturbance that evaded Will's direct notice like a shadow in his periphery, glanced only in accident.

"You're rather selfish, aren't you?" Will observed.

Hannibal smiled. "Terribly selfish, I'm afraid."

"Thought you could keep me all to yourself," Will mumbled.

"Make no mistake, dear Will," Hannibal said. "No other therapist can know you like I do."

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They finished dinner, Will getting tipsy on the wine in a way he hadn't in weeks, not exactly thrilled by the conclusion of their conversation but resigned. Will expected that the termination of their unconventional therapist-patient relationship was inevitable. It was never exactly therapy, but it was what Will needed; and with the sleepwalking, obsessive thoughts, and hallucinations Will *also* needed to sort what was happening in his mind, to not only endure but address, and prevent the obfuscation of himself. His anxiety and resentment towards the situation was mollified somewhat by Hannibal's attentive affections; and he was also quite distracted by the way Hannibal kept squeezing his hip as they cleaned up.

Hannibal went to his car to fetch his first aid kit. He made to set it on the table, but Will took his arm and lead him upstairs to the bedroom. Will sat on the edge of the bed, leaning on his arms, wearing thick socks and worn sneakers still as they had been the most comfortable for his feet. Without a word, Hannibal sank to his knees before Will, taking a foot in his lap. He removed his shoes and socks as Will watched, small tendrils of arousal stirring as Hannibal tended his wounds again, knelt before him again. Hannibal peeled off the bandages -- the small abrasions had not bled through but they had reopened over the course of the day, and the bruises were dark purple. He sniffed, but smelled no infection. Dutifully, he cleaned the wounds.

Instead of bandaging Will’s feet, Hannibal expertly massaged the top of Will's foot and his ankle, Will letting his head fall back on his shoulders and humming in contentment. Hands that hurt him, hands that healed him, matched perfectly to his mind that wielded violence for pleasure and punishment -- his own form of healing, Will supposed. Hannibal lifted Will's foot higher, his knee bending, and Will's eyes snapped open as he felt Hannibal's breath on his skin before he kissed the sole of his foot. Will's whole leg twitched at the unexpected touch and Hannibal smirked, parting his mouth to press soft lips to Will's bruised skin again. His skin was so sensitive that Hannibal's lips left fire in their wake, kissing down to his heel, lower lip dragging up the arch; and then, the catch of teeth against his bruises as Hannibal opened his mouth wide, the tip of his tongue searing wet, and Will shivered bodily. "Ah, Hannibal?" Will voiced nervously, looking down -- looking down was a mistake. Hannibal's eyes were on him as he tasted his abused skin, licking up between his toes. Then Hannibal took his big toe in his mouth, sucking.

Will bit down on a moan. "That's entirely unfair, doctor," he panted. Hannibal gave him a wicked look, licking his toe.

"There is no part of you I would not taste," Hannibal muttered, his thickly accented voice heavy, equally unfair, the entire damn mouth unfair with what it did to Will.

"That's... apparent," Will managed to say. "You're a man of tastes, Hannibal, and some of them are peculiar."

Hannibal scraped his teeth against the sole of Will's foot, and Will gasped loudly, wincing. The pain was quickly soothed by the wet heat of his tongue, and just as the pain faded into warmth, Hannibal scraped with his teeth again. He was oversensitive, and soon his whole foot felt like it was on fire. "Oh, god," he groaned, wincing and tilting his hips up, on his elbows now.

Hannibal kissed and sucked on his toes, biting them since none were lacerated. Warmth was spreading up Will’s legs, a slow build of arousal. With his spare hand Hannibal pressed Will's other foot against his groin. Will's eyes shot open -- he felt Hannibal's hard length and the sting of trouser fabric against his wounded sole. He nearly collapsed from that, gasping in mingled pleasure and pain, pressing into Hannibal's crotch to deepen the sting and feel Hannibal's cock respond, his own beginning to strain against his jeans. Hannibal traced his toes with his tongue and sucked down on them, as if they were Will's -- as if they were --

As if Hannibal were prostrate before him, worshipping him, worshipping the wounds he had inflicted. Penance. Debasement. Hannibal kneeling by his bed getting hard from sucking at his feet. Experimentally, Will rubbed his foot against Hannibal's crotch, crying out from the pain, and Hannibal growled in response. The fabric hurt in an uncomfortable way that set his teeth on edge, but he did it again. Hannibal held his foot back long enough to undo his pants and slip them partway down his hips, and allowed Will to make contact again, the silken briefs more gentle on his inflamed skin.

"Is this something you usually like?" Will panted.

Hannibal removed his toes from his mouth, leaving them glistening wet. "There is not a single part of your body I do not want to touch and be touched by," he said thickly. He kissed the bruised skin. "It is not a particular fixation."

Hannibal sounded entirely too put together, so Will rubbed his cock with his foot, clumsy but determined, and was rewarded by a shuddering moan. Will pressed Hannibal’s cock against his naval, pinning it there, and could feel it throbbing through the fabric. He pressed his other foot against Hannibal's cheek, and he took a few toes in his mouth again. Heartbeat thundering in his chest, Will pushed Hannibal's jaw open wider. Hannibal let him. Hannibal let him awkwardly explore his mouth inside and out with his toes, gagging, the noise going straight to Will's groin.

"Holy fuck." Will collapsed fully onto the bed, pulling his foot away from Hannibal's mouth. He pressed the heels of his hands against his eyes. "Fuck! Hannibal."

"Yes?" came the reply a moment later, as Hannibal stroked his ankles. His cock was still flush with Will's other foot.

Will tried to catch his breath. "Your mouth," he tried to explain.

"Would you like to use it in other ways?"

Will groaned openly. The fire from his feet was crawling up his legs, aching magnificently in his hips. "Make me come?" he asked quietly.

The look on Hannibal's face was one of lethal satisfaction. He sat up on his knees and unbuttoned Will's jeans, sliding them down. Will let Hannibal undress him, and Hannibal kissed down his exposed legs. Will pulled off his own sweater, starting to run hot, as he did so often lately -- and he was completely nude, lying comfortably on his bed, while Hannibal was dressed, knees on the floor. Thrilling. Hannibal grabbed him by the hips and pulled him to the edge of the bed, lifting both legs over his shoulders, and Will lifted his head to see Hannibal nosing his inner thigh, biting lightly, before licking a broad stripe up and over his balls.

Will keened, clenching his legs and nearly boxing Hannibal's ears. "A-ah! Fuck!" Hannibal explored him with his mouth languidly, wet full lips over his sack, dipping down low to lick his perineum once before tonguing up the underside of his cock, bringing him fully erect in moments. Will watched through heavy-lidded eyes, chest heaving, and Hannibal's eyes caught his, dark and hungry. Hannibal slowly licked around the head, not breaking eye contact -- and then he took Will into his mouth and it was *searing*. Lips working, sucking down, obscene sounds from that unfair mouth. White hot pleasure pulsed, growing hotter and hotter. Will wanted to watch but it was too intense to have Hannibal's eyes on his. His head hit the bed with a moan.

Hannibal took him deep, drawing a faintly astonished exclamation: "Oh, oh my god." Will's cockhead hit the back of his throat and he bobbed up, cheeks hollowed. The taste of him: a bitter, coppery musk. He hummed, the vibration making Will arch up, precome leaking against his palette, spurring his hunger. Hannibal stuck out his tongue and took Will deeper, hitching at the back of his throat, pressing further. Will cried out, feeling Hannibal choke on him. He raised his gaze to see Hannibal glance at him, eyes wet.

"Fuck, Hannibal -- you feel so good."

Hannibal's mouth, that slipped so nimbly and polite around his utensils, his trained palette that could parse the terroir of hundreds of wines, the minute and controlled expressions of his lips, betraying nothing unintended, the mouth that spoke with such precise artistry --was sucking him down with unabashed greed. Hannibal did not seem at first glance to be gluttonous, but he was without a doubt a devourer. A consumer of worlds. Consuming Will. Taking him inside, everything he had to offer, and Will wanted that. He wanted to be so devastatingly desired that Hannibal -- that Hannibal --

That thought led to danger: the tangle of wire, carcasses impaled on antlers, shrikes fluttering in the air, pecking his eyes out -- the feathered stag, tar black, tearing open his stomach, prey become predator through consumption -- the hot wet vacuum of Hannibal's mouth, bringing him to the edge. "W-wait," Will gasped, clenching the sheets.

Hannibal slowed, and pulled off Will with a wet noise. Will panted heavily, shuddering, forcing himself away from that edge. "Just -- god, it's too much." Will knew he was babbling, that he couldn't articulate what was happening inside of him. His cock stood achingly hard and leaking inches from Hannibal's mouth.

"What do you need?" Hannibal asked in a wrecked voice.

Will nearly sobbed. "I don't know, god. You're going to be the death of me."

A sharp intake of breath -- and then Hannibal moaned, rough as if he was trying to keep it in, and his hands clenched Will's hips hard enough to bruise, his cuts stinging under Hannibal's grasp. "Will," Hannibal breathed. "I want to taste you."

"I know, god, I know." He was on the razor's edge, not just of orgasm, but some terrible realization. He felt the stag prowling in his mind, the slow undulation of feathered muscle.

Hannibal sucked his own fingers until they were wet with saliva and circled Will's entrance, watching with predatory intent as a new bead of precome slipped down the head of his cock. He licked it up, greedy, and Will bucked his hips. "Hush, beloved," Hannibal crooned, Will whining and twitching. "Let me have you."

Will moaned his assent, "Yes." Hannibal slipped a finger in, and it burned slightly. "Yes," Will said again, the words dissolving into a panting plea -- "Please, please, oh -- yes." Hannibal wrapped his other arm around Will's leg to hold his cock still as he licked at it and massaged Will from the inside, spearing into that tight heat. Hannibal's lips smeared around his cock, and he curled his fingers just so, searching until he found his prostate. The sting of his stretched rim blossomed into hot pleasure, his nerves alight with it.

"So close," Will hissed, clenching the sheets. Molten gold pooled in his groin, throbbing with each rub of Hannibal's skilled finger. Hannibal sealed his mouth around the head of his cock, drawing his pleasure forth, bitter and silken. Will cried out at the exquisite suction, as in his mind the stag gutted him with its antlers, exposing his organs -- and Will was coming, impossibly slow, gushing into Hannibal's mouth -- and the stag made a feast of his body, snout soaked in blood -- his bloody hands sinking into an opened body, prey turned predator, bodies into feasts.

The orgasm ebbed out of him, and then the heat of Hannibal's mouth and hands were gone. Will fluttered his eyes open to see Hannibal sitting back on his heels, face tilted up, reminding Will absurdly of a supplicant receiving a blessing. Hannibal's eyes were closed. Then, he swallow down.

Exhausted and bleary-eyed but transfixed, Will watched as Hannibal rose slowly to his feet and shed his clothing. He stood tall in the bedroom light, looming above Will with a predatory hunger, all grace and power. For a while he stood completely still, save for the gentle bobbing and twitching of his hard cock, the only movement that betrayed his thought. He was considering Will. Deciding what to do with him. Will stayed still, breathing heavily. Whatever Hannibal decided, Will would accept -- and that knowledge, that the fight was out of him, that there was no need to fight or resist, cleared his anxious mind. There was no need to look away from dangerous thoughts, no need to struggle to find guilt for his fantasy of being consumed. He was Hannibal’s. He was lying prone with his torso cut open, waiting for the beast to descend.

Finally, after what felt like an age, Hannibal moved to the bedside table and fished out a bottle of lubricant, tossing it on the bed. Hannibal crawled on top of Will, on his elbows and knees, keeping their bodies apart, and took Will’s face in his hands. He rubbed Will’s cheekbones with his thumbs, Will melting into the touch, and they sank into each other’s gaze. Will could not read Hannibal’s intentions, but it wasn’t as if he saw nothing in the other man’s eyes. Hannibal was not closed off as he often was. There was greed and hunger and predatory intent -- and arousal, bouncing between them, two mirrors slowly turning towards each other to open up an infinite hallway. Without getting hard, Will felt Hannibal’s arousal as if it were his own, burning metal in his core, branding him. Still, he didn’t move. They let it build, until Will thought he saw a flicker of desperation in Hannibal’s eyes; or was that his own? Was there a difference, anymore?

Hannibal turned and lifted Will in a few precise movements, guiding him onto his hands and knees. Hannibal's hand was on the back of his neck, stroking through the dark curls at his nape. His other hand was stroking Will's hip, tracing the eye-shaped wounds. For a moment, that was the only point of contact between them. And then he pushed Will's head to the bed.

Will went down immediately, his pliant arms folding and extending by his sides. He moaned, an exhausted sound, his spent cock twitching as he realized what Hannibal had decided. Hannibal slicked himself up without a word, hand on Will's hip, and then he was pressing against Will's entrance, guiding himself inside slow but insistently. The pain knocked the breath out of him as Hannibal forced Will to stretch open around his thick cock. Will gasped for breath with a whine. It burned, his fried nerves twitching and oversensitive; and then Hannibal was seated deep inside him, filling him up with one final push, and Will saw stars.

Hannibal fucked into him hard and steady, driving him into the mattress with short grunts. Fuck, it hurt, but Will was delirious with it. He had never felt so stretched, so full, so used. Hannibal kept his hips aloft, his grip bruising, and thrust into him faster, the slap of their skin mingling with Will's keening gasps. Hitting deep. So deep and hard Will could feel it in his throat. His gasps turned into sobs, his whole body shaking with fire as Hannibal speared him open, slamming in again and again, too rough, pausing occasionally to dribble more lube on himself. Will only realized he was getting hard again when Hannibal took him in hand, and then the blackness was edging in, his body pushed past sensation he could comprehend. Will was too hot, his body screaming in protest yet revelling in it. There was no difference between pleasure and pain, it was all overwhelming intensity.

Hannibal slammed into Will's tight heat, his rim slick and red with abuse, and he felt the last threads of his self-control about to snap. He looked down at the man prostrate beneath him -- the sweat glistening on his skin, the way he twitched and cried with every thrust, the exquisite look of torture on his face as his eyes rolled into the back of his head, the marks and dark bruises on his feet. Hannibal leaned back and stroked down Will's leg, still fucking into him, still gripping his half-hard cock. His fingers drew graceful contours on his thigh and calf, down to his foot. Hannibal stroked lightly over Will's wounded arch. Will clenched around him and cried out, overwhelmed. This was the breaking point. This was the place beyond which Will could not handle. "Oh, Will," Hannibal groaned, throbbing and close.

Hannibal held those last threads of control. Almost experimentally, he dragged his thumb hard down Will's wounded foot. Will screamed, a broken and animal sound that cut off as he came and blacked out. With a few more rough thrusts Hannibal came, clutching Will's foot and hip, the wounds hot underneath his fingers.

Triptych

Chapter Summary

Will walked away from the water and deeper into the forest, frosted leaves crunching and slipping underfoot. Brambles caught at his skin. He was naked, of course. Defenseless. Waiting. Forcing himself into the thorny briar of his wicked fantasies, needing to shape the violence in his mind to a form of his own making, a shape he deserved. Will emerged into a clearing, covered in scratches. Blood welled upon his skin, calling to the beasts.

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Will is spiraling.

Chapter Notes

I feel a bit like Hannibal: I have these plans for Will and he keeps exceeding and subverting my expectations for his behavior.

cw: a few references to consensual non-con and case object rape, as in some of the previous chapters.

tumblr

See the end of the chapter for more notes

If the Marionette Murderer was leaving a trail for the BAU to follow, they were following it cautiously. Will was determined to sniff out the lures before any other agent or police officer was hurt; but moving slowly meant she could slip out of their grasp. The profile was narrowing down and each step in the right direction was a potential trap.

It was an atypical form of acceleration. The Marionette's first displayed murder in Baltimore was back in October with one victim. Her second had two victims and was a full two months later, suggesting that it took that amount of time to plan her design. But the third display with Marcus followed only two weeks later, even though it must have taken longer to plan a web of that intricacy. Marie Ward, the only woman the Marionette had ever killed to their knowledge, had been found five weeks later. It was as if the Marionette had come to Baltimore to display her evolution as a killer and had changed plans to foil and provoke the FBI when she realized that they were narrowing down her profile. But that raised an important question: how had she known that the FBI had realized she was a woman?

Marie Ward had been a digital archivist who had lived in Baltimore her whole life. She had been emancipated at 17 after her family had kicked her out. At age 29 she lived alone, which was the main categorical difference between Marie Ward and the other woman who still lived in Baltimore, Cecilia Burke, who was married with one child. If the Marionette had to chose between Ms. Ward and Mrs. Burke, it made sense that she chose the woman who lived alone. The other five women who no longer lived in Baltimore were found and vetted. The team expanded their profile.

A white woman, emancipated 5-20 years ago from Baltimore. One of the categories Will and Beverly had used to find the seven women including Marie Ward was not accurate for the Marionette. But likely just one. They were close.

There was no need to stab in the dark. Her lure was bright and iridescent. Marie Ward had been dead for three days before she was found, but her phone had been used up until the day she was discovered. No calls. The only app that had been used was Walk With Me. After she had died, 'Marie Ward' travelled to and checked in at three different locations: two inactive construction sites and one building set for demolition.

The days were blurring together for Will. Only a few were passing but they felt unfathomably long in the way that happened when a case was hot. Stretches of time were marked and bracketed only by Hannibal's strict meal schedule, though Will wasn't really eating meals so much as shoving something in his face as he drove or stared at the walls. His mind was vacillating between extreme focus on the case and a dark fog of disassociation. His fingers kept slipping beneath the band of his pants to feel the eye-shaped scabs on his skin, the bandages long since peeled away. He kept standing until his legs gave out and his feet ached.

Jack was arguing. They were all arguing -- how to walk into a trap without falling prey to it. They kept looking at Will as if he could psychically intuit the exact nature of the trap; which, his mind provided later, meant that there was fear in the room. "She will use the tools she is comfortable with," Will heard himself saying. "Cables, release mechanisms, acid. She knows we will be expecting a trap, so it will literally be a matter of watching our step."

Jack's team of hand-selected field agents and Baltimore's finest entered the first construction site without incident. But what they found in the subterranean level was a problem: a room filled to the brim with razor wire with a bloody display in the center. The body was completely covered with a once-white sheet, it's form unrecognizable, wire wrapped loosely around it but with the threat of going taut, and a bucket suspended over it.

"This is some Saw shit," Beverly said.

The team brought in lights and Will understood the trap within moments. "If we cut through the razor wire, the body will be cut up and, more importantly, doused in acid." He squinted. It didn't look like whatever was underneath the sheet was breathing, but they just couldn't tell from here.

They decked out an agent head to toe in protective gear and tools to cut himself free. Will watched in fascination as he maneuvered between the lines of razor wire, crawling and contorting towards the prize in the center. Will needed to sit down but he had to watch, he couldn't look away. Someone brought him water -- Beverly. It took over an hour for the agent to reach the body. Describing what he saw over the radio in his helmet, it seemed like they couldn't remove the bucket of acid from the hook without possibly releasing some mechanism, but there were no other signs of

a trap. No signs of breathing. Jack gave the ok for the agent to pull back the bloody sheet.

From as far away as he could, the agent grabbed the corner of the sheet and slowly pulled it back.

Underneath was a pig.

The last time Will had vomited at a scene was back in New Orleans, but as he stood over the mutilated body of the pig, only half aware of how he had gotten there, he felt the bile rising in his throat at the implication laying clear before him. This surrogate for a human, this practice doll. Three locations. Will had been the one to call the Chesapeake Ripper's kills of three *sounders*; he had been the one to write extensively about how the Ripper saw his victims as swine.

There were too many damn serial killers in Baltimore.

"Will?"

Will looked up. He was sitting in the chair of their briefing room facing the wall of evidence and suspects, and Hannibal's hand was on his shoulder. Will squinted and adjusted his glasses. "What are you doing here?" he asked.

Hannibal's face went blank -- surprise. His lips parted, considering, taken aback. "You asked me to pick you up," Hannibal said carefully.

Will grunted. "Right. Sorry, I'm out of it." Really out of it. He fished his phone out of his pocket and saw the unread message from Hannibal, and the time, 7:12pm. He could piece together everything that happened today, he could; it was just blurred and unfocused. Hannibal squeezed his shoulder. God, Will was glad he was here. Hannibal's touch dispelled some of the fog in his mind.

Hannibal rested the back of his hand on Will's damp forehead. "You're warm." Hannibal pulled out the chair next to Will and looked at the papers before him. Will had a pen loosely in hand, and the brief copies before him were covered with obsessive doodling of the letters *ii*. Hannibal withdrew a small notepad from his jacket pocket, and opened it to a blank page before handing it to Will. "Draw a clock for me, with the current time," he instructed.

Will took the notepad with a slight frown, but didn't question the strange command. Quickly, he drew a circle and numbered it, jerkily marking the hands of the clock. "A grounding exercise," Hannibal explained. "In case you ever feel lost, say to yourself the time, your name, and where you are."

"It's 7:12pm," Will said. "My name is Will Graham, and I am at the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit in Quantico."

Hannibal took back the notebook and looked at the drawing briefly before folding it away in his coat. "Come, let me take you home."

Home. Will wasn't sure whether Hannibal meant Wolf Trap or his house. Will grabbed his belongings, and fetched his bottle of aspirin with shaking hands. Hannibal took Will's wrist gently, stilling him as he fumbled at the cap, and Will looked up, registering the slight frown of concern. "How many have you had today?" Hannibal asked.

Will huffed in amusement. "Hell if I know."

"We will find something else for the fever," Hannibal decided.

As they walked down the halls of the Bureau, Hannibal's hand on the small of Will's back, guiding and protective, Will felt curious eyes follow them. He was too tired to be truly angry but the bitterness was there, hot in his stomach. Jack's mad bloodhound, escorted out by his psychiatrist. How dare they stare.

"Are you up for dinner tonight?" Hannibal asked as they drove.

Will closed his eyes briefly as he searched his mind. Dinner tonight, Wednesday. They were having Abigail for dinner, with the idea of telling her about their relationship. "I don't know," Will answered honestly. "I keep slipping in and out."

"I'd like to take your temperature, but the fever is mild," Hannibal said as he drove. "It's likely exhaustion and dehydration, but if you don't recuperate you could get sick. You'll stay home from work tomorrow."

Will's mouth was dry. "I can't. We're going to the second trap tomorrow."

"Trap?" Hannibal asked sharply.

Will stared at him. It was surprising that Hannibal didn't know everything Will did, that he wasn't actually in Will's mind. He had to remind himself that Hannibal wasn't omniscient. "She left us three locations," Will explained as he stared out the window, watching the city roll by. "The trap was not sprung." He spoke slowly, words like venom. "She left us a *pig*."

Hannibal said nothing, calm as ever as he digested the information. Will looked at him and found his face unreadable. "A pig, Hannibal," Will repeated. "She's giving us a sounder of three."

Hannibal's lips twitched. Maybe he was picking up Will's habit of smiling when nothing was humorous yet everything so artfully disturbed. "She has been reading your work," Hannibal said slowly.

"She's not the only one," Will practically spat. "Just my luck to have two serial killers eyeing me."

"Thanks to Ms. Lounds, you are publicly known as the BAU's serial killer savant."

"Their blood hound," Will hissed.

"Indeed," Hannibal said, glancing over at Will. "Is this a case of Occam's Razor or Hickam's Dictum?"

"The pieces don't fit together," Will said with a sigh. "And yet, the connections cannot be incidental."

"The Marionette Murderer, the Copycat, and even Tobias Budge do not exist in a vacuum. The Marionette is taking inspiration just as Budge did. And, needless to say, the Copycat does as well."

Will stared out at the night passing through the window. "The Ripper hasn't killed in two years."

"Yet his influence remains," Hannibal said.

Will considered that. The Copycat had taken surgical trophies just like the Ripper, and his kills had been similarly theatrical. Budge had killed in order to take body parts and remained hidden, but his first display had been inspired as well. The Marionette was her own creature, and took no trophies, but the extravagant puppetry of her displays was doubtless worthy of the Ripper. Worthy. Had the Marionette left Will pigs to tell him she saw her victims in a similar way to the Chesapeake Ripper? Was it simply a taunt that she, too, would be uncaught? Was she paying homage, and if so, why?

"The simplest explanation," Will mused, "Is that the Copycat is the Ripper." He hadn't realized it until he said it.

The car slowed to a stop at an intersection. Hannibal's profiled was edged with red, a slight frown and crease in his brow. "If so, do the pieces fit?"

Will saw the shards come together, broken edges scraping and slotting together. A distorted portrait of himself.

"If the Ripper had any reason to be interested in me, maybe," Will said at last. "Maybe then the pieces would fit."

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It almost felt like family -- Hannibal slicing fine slivers of rare meat for their simple but elegant meal, while Will and Abigail chatted mischievously about the macabre decoration of his ostentatious living room. Abigail played a half-remembered tune on the harpsichord. When dinner was ready, Will moved the vase of sweet william and carnations to the table, a floral splash to the minimal centerpiece Hannibal had already set. Hannibal gave him a small smile, and Will knew that Hannibal would leave the flowers there until Will moved them. Will wanted to watch them dry and rot.

Will and Abigail sat to Hannibal's left and right. Family. Will wondered if it was fair for him to think of them as such, if he could ever deserve this after what he had taken from Abigail.

"This looks so much better than what I've been eating," Abigail said with a shy smile.

"Doubtless," Hannibal said, taking up his fork and knife. "The hospital's menus leaves much to be desired."

"He's trying to spoil us," Will commented with a smirk.

"I find a good meal induces good conversation," Hannibal said smoothly, "And as my guests it is my pleasure to spoil you. Bon appetite."

Will cut into the red, barely seared meat, and took his first bite. It was tender and filled with raw flavor. "Delicious as usual," he said.

Will noticed out of the corner of his vision Abigail's eyes go wide as she tasted the meat, looking towards Hannibal. She took a hasty sip of water. "It's nice to get out," she said nervously. "Thank you."

"You are always welcome in my home, Abigail," Hannibal said. "I hope in time you will feel comfortable here."

Hannibal guided the conversation with the grace of a conductor, and Will found himself reacting easily. Hannibal prompted, and Will responded, playing at stability for Abigail's sake. Even though she was trying to hide it, Will saw that Abigail was nervous, glancing between Hannibal and Will for the answer to some unspoken question. Even as she described for Will what she was reading about the Aztecs, her enthusiasm was tempered. Occam's Razor -- maybe it was Will's stress leaking out of him like a toxic spill.

But also, for all the good food and conversation, they had brought Abigail here for a reason. Will cleared his throat, then felt embarrassed for doing so. His companions turned their attentions to him. "Abigail," Will started, not quite looking at her, "There's something we wanted to tell you."

Will didn't think it was possible for Abigail to look more pale, but she did, her doe-eyes shining. Unsure how to proceed, Will took a sip of his wine.

Hannibal gave Will a look of fond affection, disarming Abigail completely. She frowned. "Will and I have grown quite fond of you, Abigail," Hannibal said to her in a soothing voice, and Will was grateful he was taking over from here. "As you undoubtedly know. The circumstances in which we came into each other's lives were brutal, yet from that unfortunate beginning we have formed enduring bonds. Both Will and I wanted you to know before others that we are in a relationship."

Will blushed hot up to his ears, and now he was the one staring at his plate, but he couldn't help but smile. He heard Abigail laugh nervously. "That's what this is about?" she asked.

"Yes," Hannibal replied.

"I'm not surprised," she said, almost haughtily.

"You are quite observant," Hannibal said fondly.

"Yeah, and the both of you tend to... stare at each other." She grinned.

Will adjusted his glasses. "Well, staring aside, we wanted you to know." He took a deep breath. "I know I have no right, so I won't even voice it. Just know that I want to..." Will swallowed. "Teach you to fish. Go camping. I'd really like that."

"We are here for you, Abigail," Hannibal said. "In whatever capacity you will have us."

"Thanks," Abigail said, dipping her head. "I'm glad you told me, and -- I'm happy for you."

Will's chest tightened with that familiar ache.

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Hannibal asked Abigail to help him with the dishes while Will waited in the study. He was glad for the reprieve, and collapsed on the couch with his arm thrown over his eyes, his heart a lead weight in his chest. Desperation was clawing in from the edges. He wanted to be well, for Abigail, for a distant spring where the three of them could get away from everything and be out in nature, Hannibal cooking the fish they caught. If the winter would ever end.

Hannibal's footsteps were light on the carpet as he walked to Will, and when Will peeked up from beneath his arm he saw Hannibal's eyes wet and vulnerable and proud. Hannibal sat on the edge of the couch, placing a hand on Will's chest. "Abigail is weary," he said. "I am going to take her back to the hospital."

Will rested his hand atop Hannibal's, stroking his fingers. "Tell her goodnight for me," Will said in an exhausted voice. He didn't ask what had been said between Hannibal and Abigail, but it was obvious that they had exchanged a vulnerable moment. Without him. He turned his head into his arm.

"I told her we would protect her," Hannibal whispered, as if the promise was delicate and must be handled with care.

Will simply nodded, hot tears brimming behind his eyes.

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Jack argued but eventually relented, and Will did not join the team to the second location the following day. He knew it would be another pig, not a human. The trap would be different, but there were engineers on the team who could unravel it safely.

“Motivation is a key component to these traps,” Jack had said, like an accusation.

“I’ve already told you her motivation,” Will snapped back.

“If she’s teasing you, then you should be here.”

“Tell me what you find, Jack.”

Another construction site. Another pig, suspended high between L-beams, meat hooks stretching the flesh out of place. Fixed snare traps littered the floor so obvious there was no real danger.

Beverly worked the database of names. Women whose permanent address was unknown, or who didn’t live at their listed permanent address. One by one, the photos of suspects were taken down from the wall, as calls came in from across the country. Logistically, it was a nightmare, and Jack spent most of his time on the phone with different police departments.

Since the danger had been mitigated at the first two locations, Will also stayed home from the third. He desperately needed the rest, and Hannibal took care of him, only leaving his side for appointments with patients. It was starting to work. Will was starting to come back to himself. The day wasn't fragmented into states of mind where he was present or drifting. Just another day, and his head could clear, and he would breathe deep the winter air, and refocus on catching the Marionette.

And then the floor collapsed at the third location, trapping two agents in a web of slowly tightening razor wire.

When Will arrived at the scene the two agents had stopped screaming and moving, but he heard their frightened cries nonetheless; how they scrambled at the wires as their weight bore them down and forced the lines to constrict, fear ringing high and loud; how those screams choked into dying rattles as a wire slipped up between the chinks of protective armor and slit the guts of one open, intestines draping over the web; how in a panic the other began to cut himself free only to drop a weight and have the whole web sinch deadly tight.

In this trap, the pig had not been mutilated.

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Will filled the claw foot tub with hot water, his back to the bathroom mirrors. He stripped his clothes and the small bandages on his feet and hips. The wounds from the nail clippers were a swarm of soft pink scar tissue and hard, cracking scabs. He ran his fingers over each as the tub filled, thinking of flesh beneath his clawing hands.

Will slipped into the water and opened his mind to the river, to the forest. It was night, and he stood on the bank. The light of the moon broke on the surface of the black, opaque water, the luminous motion resonating with the rustling of branches.

Will walked away from the water and deeper into the forest, frosted leaves crunching and slipping underfoot. Brambles caught at his skin. He was naked, of course. Defenseless. Waiting. Forcing himself into the thorny briar of his wicked fantasies, needing to shape the violence in his mind to a form of his own making, a shape he deserved. Will emerged into a clearing, covered in scratches. Blood welled upon his skin, calling to the beasts.

Fragments of old fantasies darted in his mind: staggering to Hannibal's door in a broken body; spread out and eviscerated on his dining room table, flowers sprouting between his ribs; being fucked into the concrete floor of a cell; the Marionette hoisting him high upon a meat hook; the bloody rim of bottles on a motel floor.

Will thought of giving up, of walking into the next crime scene and sitting on the floor until someone noticed the screaming in his head. Jack would have cleared the room, so it would be ages before anyone noticed. Did Graham usually take this long? Calling to him, opening the door -- and Will would just be sitting there, and he would be *gone* . If anyone touched him his body would scream and scream until his throat was raw. They would call Hannibal and Alana, and it was almost satisfying to imagine them desperately trying to reach him and failing. Will wondered how long

Hannibal would visit him in the hospital if he were mute. Maybe they would play go and that would be the form of their communications, Hannibal's patiently traveling groups, Will sacrificing stones in a silent apology.

Will felt more than heard the canter of hooves through the forest. The night snapped and cracked open, and Will was running, crashing through bushes, specks of blood floating in the air, igniting the stag's bloodlust as it tore through the forest after him, antlers tearing everything in its path. Heart hammering, legs burning, desperate, *no*. The stag slammed Will into a thick tree and pain coursed through him as the tips of antlers pierced him, impaling him, blood soaked tips sinking into the bark.

The antlers grew inside of him, piercing from beneath his shoulder blades to emerge with a slick pop of broken skin above his clavicle. They twined around his bones, becoming a new rib cage, and sank into the thick meat of his thighs. Blood ran down his body and pooled between his feet, each penetrating antler stretching his wounds as the beast breathed against his back. An almost human hand touched the back of his neck, but it was too large, wrapping around his entire neck, slowly squeezing out his breath. Two inhumanly large fingers pulled down his lower lip, splitting it with the glide of sharp nails. Will gasped out, a ragged choke, and then the claws were dipping into his mouth, sliding down his tongue and to the back of his throat, forcing deeper -- and then the beast filled him up entirely, ebony ooze filling his throat, lungs, and stomach, like Will was a mold being cast. The beast lifted its crown and Will sank back onto the antlers with a thunderous pulse of arousal.

Sinking. Bleeding. Stretched open.

The fantasy shifted suddenly, like the floor was upended beneath him. Will was tied up in rope on a motel bed, the restraints cutting into his skin, far tighter than Hannibal would ever tie him. He was contorted: knees bent beneath him and legs spread, arms twisted behind his back and wrists attached to ankles in such a way that his back was bent in a torturous arch. A woman sat on the end of the bed, her face an undulation of morphing features.

"You wanted to see," the Marionette Murderer said, voice like horse hair against steel. In her gloved hands she held a bottle.

"I saw what you did," Will spat back. "Why are you regressing to your old M.O.?"

"This is your fantasy, Will." She lifted a beer bottle to her lips and took a swig. The ropes constricted around him, biting into his flesh. "You crave a personal, brutal violation." She took out a cloth and wiped the rim of the bottle, cleaning up the trace DNA.

Blood against brown glass. Torn muscle. Antlers sliding in and out of puncture wounds.

The bath water grew cold around Will as he hung heavy with his arms over the lip, numbly letting the fantasy play. There was no satisfaction, no edge.

Hannibal found him that way, skin wrinkled and goose-bumped from the cold water, eyes glassy. He walked to the side of the tub and Will gave no indication that he was aware Hannibal had entered the room. He appeared conscious and wasn't very feverish, but had obviously retreated somewhere deep in his mind. "Will," Hannibal called gently, resting his fingertips on the other man's bicep.

Will blinked. Tilted his head towards Hannibal a fraction, a subtle acknowledgement. Hannibal stepped behind him and set to bringing his consciousness back to his body, lightly trailing his fingers up and down Will's arms. He built contact slowly until he was squeezing Will's shoulders and massaging into the tight muscles of his neck, too gentle to really work out the knots. Will tilted his head back, eyes still vacant. Hannibal ran both hands through Will's drying hair, rubbing and lightly scratching his scalp.

"Come back to me, Will," Hannibal murmured against his ear.

"I'm here," Will said, the words barely leaving his mouth as if he were speaking from somewhere deep inside himself.

"Are you?"

Will sighed, and the breath of air seemed to return him more to himself. He pinched his eyes shut and leaned into Hannibal's touch. "Can't leave, can't stay," he muttered. "I feel stuck."

Hannibal stroked his hair over and over, nails dragging across the slope of his shoulders and back up through his curls. "What were you imagining?" he asked, accent thick on his tongue.

"I keep trying to break myself," Will said in a hollow voice. "It doesn't work."

"You bend." Hannibal ran his hands down Will's chest and into the cool water. "You are not meant for breaking."

Will shook his head. "Something's gotta give. Dry me off."

He had meant it as a question, but it came out more like a command, and that chased the fantasies away more than Hannibal's soothing hands. Hannibal's breath held momentarily in his chest, and Will glanced up at the mirror to catch the widening of his red-brown eyes. Then, Hannibal fetched a towel. He helped Will stand and exit the tub, his body weak and in need of guidance, his face uncharacteristically blank. Hannibal pressed the soft towel to his skin, first wringing out the curls of the back of his neck, then drying each limb. Will held himself out limply and Hannibal kept a hand at his hip to steady him when he sat on his heels to dry Will's legs. Dutiful.

When Will was dry, Hannibal looked up from his kneeling position on the floor. Will watched him with an unfocused gaze, considering. He put his finger in the loop of Hannibal's tie and pulled up, Hannibal rising gracefully to his feet; and then Will put his hand on his collar and backed him up against the tiled wall, the other man bending to his will so easily. "I feel powerless," Will said as Hannibal's shoulders hit the wall. His hand slid up to hold Hannibal's neck, noting the way his bow-shaped lips parted in soundless arousal. "Like I'm following strings maneuvered by another."

Hannibal kept his hands by his sides. His eyes bored into Will, and even though he didn't look at him directly Will could feel that gaze burn his skin. "I feel like this winter will never end."

"There will yet be a spring for us," Hannibal said, tongue resting on his lip. "For you, myself, and Abigail."

"I wonder if I will emerge from it the same person," Will said. He pressed his naked and exhausted

form against Hannibal, leaning to ghost his lips against his jaw as he spoke. "When the ice thaws, what will remain?"

"Would it be so bad, to come forth changed?" Hannibal asked, voice heavy and silken. "What dies in winter makes room for growth come spring."

Will released Hannibal's throat and thumbed along his jaw. Though he was weary to the bone, his mind was clear. He needed to decide: power or helplessness -- had already decided that the purgatory of doubt would unravel him far faster than any stress. He needed control, one way or the other. "Take off your clothes," Will said quietly.

Hannibal inhaled sharply. Glancing down, Will could see his arousal begin to grow in his slacks. Hannibal was excited by the prospect of Will taking control. Interesting. Hannibal hesitated only a moment before reaching up and untying his tie, searching for eye contact that Will avoided. "Would dominating me help you feel more in control of yourself?" Hannibal asked as he undid the buttons of his shirt.

Will didn't help him undressed. Instead, he watched Hannibal's hands work as he stroked the back of his neck. "Maybe," Will said. "I'm moving instinctively."

Hannibal tugged his shirt out of his pants and finished unbuttoning. "What do your instincts tell you?"

Will raised both hands to Hannibal's jaw and stroked down, over his prominent collarbone and broad chest, through the silver spun hair. He could feel the blood pumping under his skin. How had they been in this arrangement for what felt like an eternity, and yet Will had barely had the time to touch Hannibal in all the ways he desired? It had not been much time after all, and Will was fatalistically aware of how little time it felt they had left -- before what, he didn't know. Before the groaning ice cracked and he fell beneath the frozen surface. Before the breaking thing inside him grew too large and terrible to be contained by his skin.

“They tell me to bring my fantasies to life,” Will said. Hannibal shrugged out of his shirt, and Will watched distantly as he folded it. Will took it from his hands, waiting as Hannibal unbuttoned his pants. Everything always needed to be in its place -- except when Will altered the shape of Hannibal’s world, a flower left to wilt on the bedside table. He considered dropping the shirt and tie to the bathroom floor.

Hannibal folded his pants and briefs, handing them to Will. His eyes blazed dark red, and his cock hung heavy between his legs. There was satisfaction to having Hannibal anticipate, while Will coldly directed them. He placed two fingers on Hannibal’s chest, and Hannibal pushed himself back against the wall. There was no need to use force. Hannibal wanted what Will wanted. Will left him to place his clothes on the bathroom counter and then returned, taking Hannibal’s wrists and pinning them on either side of his head, sliding close, and finally -- finally -- looking into his eyes.

“I want you to rape me,” Will said.

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"Good evening, Will," Alana said as she welcomed him into her office. Will gave her a nod and walked in, exploring the space. Even though it was ridiculous to be used to the absurd luxury of Hannibal's office, without the high ceiling he felt claustrophobic. Alana's office was modestly sized in comparison, all soft teals and creams, with a few plants and abstract photographs, a single bookshelf behind her desk. Will eyed the couch and armchair. The lack of symmetry struck him as an imbalance of exchange. This would not be a two-way conversation.

Finally, Will hung up his winter coat, and sat on the couch, crossing his arms over his chest. Alana took a seat in the armchair opposite him. "How are you?" she asked, sounding exactly as she always did.

"Tired and apprehensive," Will said numbly. “Two agents died yesterday.”

“That's not your fault.”

“Actually, Alana, it very nearly is.” Will stared at a photograph over her shoulder, words and mind drained of all feeling. “If I had been there like Jack had asked me, I would have noticed the deflection. This pig wasn't mutilated like the others. It was a distraction to the real carnage.”

“If you had gone, things might have turned out differently,” Alana said with a shrug. “Or you might not have discovered the trap, or fallen prey to it yourself.”

“I would have noticed,” Will said.

“Why didn't you go to the sites?” Alana asked.

“My doctor suggested I take a few days off.” Even in the corner of his eye, Will noticed the tension in Alana’s jaw and the way she rolled her shoulders back to dispell it.

“Have you been feeling unwell?”

“Might be coming down with something. I haven't repaired the hole in the chimney so the house is freezing.”

“Stress can compromise our immune systems.”

Will barely smiled. “Why would I be stressed, Doctor Bloom?”

Alana folded her hands in her lap. “Survivor's guilt, a change of therapists, a stressful work environment. I've read Doctor Lecter’s note of field clearance and I know why he wrote it, but you know how I feel about your consultations.”

“Jack won't accept a rescindment of my clearance,” Will said, exasperated. “You’ll have to lock me up to keep him away from me.”

“That's not going to happen,” Alana said with a small smile. “Though I believe Chilton has a premium suite ready for you.”

“My name on a plaque?”

“Something like that.”

Will relaxed into the couch. Alana didn't suspect he was experiencing psychotic symptoms, and took Will's mention of being locked up as a jest. Or, she was maneuvering. Will couldn't tell her about all of his symptoms, not the ones that couldn't be chalked up to a standard case of PTSD. Let her think, like Hannibal did, that Will's deteriorating mental state was the stress of trauma, that he experienced flashbacks instead of hallucinations. "I won't make this easy on you," Will said with a sigh. "I can't."

Alana considered him. "I know. But I already have you talking so maybe it won't be as hard as you think. Where would you like to begin?"

Nowhere Will thought. "Tell me your expectations," he said instead.

"I expect you won't make this easy," Alana replied, not unkindly. "I expect that you won't be forthcoming with me at first, and that's alright. Our sessions won't be anything like Dr. Lecter's, and I expect you to remember that."

Will smirked, still not looking at her. "Hard to forget."

Silence. Then: "What do you expect?"

Will licked his lips. He expected to obfuscate and distract from that which he couldn't tell Alana -- the hallucinations, the disturbing fantasies, any symptoms that could land him in a hospital. He would hold his cards close to his chest in much the same way that he did with Hannibal what felt like an eon ago. "I expect to shut down," he said, "and for your friendly attempts to wear like water against an already smooth stone."

Alana sighed. "I'm not going to psychoanalyze you."

"Isn't that your job?" Will raised an eyebrow, glancing in her general direction.

"I'm also going to try not to rise to the bait and be combative with you."

Will turned his head away, gripping his arms in front of his chest. "Not sure I know any other way to be," he admitted.

"You once called me to your house to try to catch a wounded animal," Alana said without a trace of frustration. "And admonished me for avoiding being alone in a room with you. Our interactions don't have to be combative."

"And tried to kiss you," Will added. "Don't forget that."

"Hard to forget." Alana reflected his words back at him, softly playful.

Will finally looked at her, not directly in the eyes. She was trying. It would be unfair to call her kindness manipulation but neither would it be entirely inaccurate. Will had seen her interview before and read the transcripts of her sessions with patients at the BSHCI -- Alana's primary tactic was disarming her subject. And Will did not wish to be disarmed.

So, Will attempted to disarm. "I was already seeing Hannibal when I kissed you."

Alana frowned, shifting uncomfortably in her seat. "I hadn't expected that you'd want to talk about Hannibal with me."

"I mean to talk about us," Will clarified. "You've got me in a room alone, after all."

Alana crossed her legs and placed her hands on her knee, a line furrowing her brow for a moment. "I have personal feelings for you, Will," she said in a firm voice. " And it upsets me that you kissed me when you were already involved with someone else. But I'm setting those feelings aside."

/Unlike Hannibal/ Will heard. "What feelings are you not setting aside?" he asked.

"My concern for your wellbeing," Alana said with a bite to her words. "My anger at Jack for continuing to pressure you into going into the field."

“Jack’s stubbornness will not be assuaged by your anger.”

"No,” Alana admitted. “But it will keep me focused. Do you want to stop consulting?"

Will removed his glasses and scrubbed his face with one hand. A headache was blooming against his skull. "It's not that simple."

"Will."

Will fumbled his glasses back on and stared at the rims in the general direction of Alana, knowing that she would be able to tell he was avoiding eye contact. He didn't want to see the minute expressions of her face. It was enough to hear the deeply laden concern in her voice. "I've been thinking about quitting again," he admitted. Of course, it was far too late for him to quit and untangle himself from Baltimore's web of serial killers. They were embedded deep inside him, not just their mentalities but the shape of their future deeds.

The Copycat, with his gift of Freddie Lounds' surrogate.

The Marionette Murderer, with her three little pigs.

Garett Jacob Hobbs, with Abigail's haunted legacy.

"And why are you thinking about quitting?" Alana asked.

"Abigail," Will said quietly. "Hannibal."

"You want to be able to take care of them?" Alana asked.

Will smiled. His bar wasn't even that high. He just wanted to be with them.

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“Last week, a woman with your very same name was found dead in her apartment.” Hannibal watched ‘Marie Ward’ fidget in the chair across from him, picking the dirt out from under her fingernails and picking at the cuticles. “Similar in age and circumstances.”

“Well that’s ominous,” she said, brushing her nails against her jeans.

Hannibal curtailed his disgust for the habit and made a mental note to clean around the chair before she left. “Not necessarily,” he replied. “You have a surrogate with which to cheat death.”

“A bullet with my name on it?”

“Precisely.”

She stretched out on the chair, resting her hands on her stomach and head tilted towards the ceiling. “Maybe I should have kept the bullet. Death isn’t so easily swindled.”

“Are you regretting your decision to play cat and mouse with the FBI?”

She stared at the ceiling. It was odd how she would assume moments of stillness after periods of animation, and when she eventually spoke her voice was flat. “Are you?”

“We are playing different games,” Hannibal replied easily.

“Sure, sure. I don't want to get caught.”

“Why would you get caught?”

She looked down her nose at him, and then back up at the ceiling. “They won't find me in the system. But I don't like changing my plans and moving this quickly. Not sure where I'm headed.”

“For persons like ourselves, it is necessary to adapt. A change in our behavior risks capture, yet evolution does not inherently lead to discovery. You have elevated your art form and found your audience, and now your audience is educated enough to appreciate what it is you do.”

“You make it sounds like I'm at my peak game.”

“You are, ultimately, uneasy with being known,” Hannibal observed. “You wish to defy their expectations when there is no need to do so. You can simply enact your show.”

She shifted in her chair to look at him, head propped up on one hand. “Wasn't sure whether you would appreciate my pigs or be angry.”

Hannibal cocked his head. “Your pigs were more for Will Graham than myself.”

She grinned. “Hence anticipating your wrath.”

“I have been quite explicit regarding Will,” Hannibal said. “Your provocations are not unwelcome. It is perfectly fine to make references to other art in one's work, so long as one’s vision is not corrupted.”

She placed her hands on her knees and stretched up, cat like, cracking her neck savagely. “I feel very grateful to have such an understanding and generous therapist,” she said all silken smooth, her voice higher than usual. “How will I ever repay you, Doctor Lecter?”

Chapter End Notes

content warning for next chapter

next chapter is going to be a consensual non-consent scene with Will and Hannibal. they will be negotiating the scene at the beginning.

Violation

Chapter Summary

"Speaking of being unconventional," Hannibal said casually, "how do you want me to violate you?"

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Will and Hannibal consent.

Chapter Notes

CONSENSUAL NON-CONSENT CHAPTER

enter at your own risk

hello lovely readers! we're finally at the con-non-con scene. this chapter is entirely about Will and Hannibal role playing a rape scene so if that's not your thing go ahead and skip this chapter and check the end notes for a tl;dr. everything before the break is a nice date where they discuss their scene.

some of the descriptions of Will's discomfort and what he goes through might trigger / squick. did for me when I wrote it. but hopefully it's mostly hot and intense. my radar for these things is totally skewed idk (i can do worse).

thank u thank u for reading and your comments always make me smile! say hi to me on tumblr

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Salud 22 was a tapas bar in the heart of Baltimore with a minimal modern design of exposed bulbs and dark wood. Most of the seating was at curving bars where patrons plucked tapas from towers of plates, but the host brought Hannibal and Will to a small table near the back. Almost as soon as they had sat down, a fat woman in a black apron approached the table with a smirk.

"*¡Quant temps, Senyor Lecter!*" she exclaimed, taking Hannibal's offered hand and exchanging kisses on each cheek. "So good to see you."

"Senyora Costa," Hannibal greeted with a smile, giving her hand a squeeze before releasing it. "You look radiant as always. May I introduce my partner, Will Graham."

Will felt his stomach grow warm at the word *partner*, and the way it fell from Hannibal's lips as if he had been saying it for years. *Partner* felt more permanent than *boyfriend*, (which Will couldn't imagine Hannibal saying) but why had he labeled their relationship at all? A gesture of possession,

Will surmised. Will turned in his seat to accept Senyora Costa's hand and the air kisses by his cheek.

"A pleasure to meet you," Will said as he adjusted his glasses, hiding his discomfort with the physical touch. Normally he would flinch at such a thing, but he didn't mind performing for Hannibal, knowing the other man wouldn't lead him astray in social interactions.

"The pleasure is all mine, I assure you. Hannibal is one of my favorite patrons and the guinea pig for my more experimental dishes, which by the way --" she turned to Hannibal, "I insist you try tonight."

"How could I refuse?" Hannibal smiled at her with a flash of teeth.

"I'll bring you a bottle and something to start," Senyora Costa said, and with a gesture of her wrist she summoned a waitperson to her side and spoke to her rapidly as she charged back to the kitchen.

Feeling slightly like a whirlwind had just passed through, Will took a moment to compose himself at their table. "Senyora Costa is the head chef and owner of this establishment," Hannibal explained while Will sipped his water, "and a frightfully good cook."

"I imagine there are several high end restaurants that roll out the red carpet for you," Will said. The waitress returned with a bottle of white wine which she opened with a flourish, explaining its properties before placing it in an ice stand to air. Will gave Hannibal a pointed look.

"I won't deny it," Hannibal said. "A loyal customer who can truly appreciate a chef's art, yet isn't a critic, is a commodity many chefs seek. All chefs have fierce personalities, and Senyora Costa is one of the more jovial."

"You collect them," Will observed.

Hannibal gave a small nod. "Have you ever had tapas before?"

"I haven't."

"Tapas are Spanish appetizers, named for *tapar,* to cover, for the pot lids they were served on, and the Andalusian covers that kept flies from the sherry. A slice of bread resting atop the glass," Hannibal explained in the sonorous tone he used when speaking of the culture of food. "The cuisine has evolved into a meal of its own right. The Spanish dine later than us, and many spend their evenings roaming between bars sampling tapas."

The waitress returned with two glasses and poured their wine. Will watched as Hannibal did his little ritual: bringing the wide glass to his nose, inhaling with absolute concentration, and then bringing the wine to his lips. Will's own mouth watered as he watched Hannibal taste, so he mirrored him, scenting and then sipping the wine. It was tart and cool. Hannibal parted his lips with a small noise of tongue releasing from palette. "Quite refreshing."

"You have to be careful when you do that," Will said with a smirk.

Hannibal's eyes flashed to Will. "And what is that?"

Will tapped his chin to draw Hannibal's attention to his mouth. "Sometimes, before you speak, you make this little sound." He mimicked it, creating a small suction with his tongue at the back of his

teeth. "Like that."

Hannibal's tongue moved inside of his mouth. "So you are correct. I was quite unaware--" he licked his lips, and in the pause was careful not to repeat the noise. "-- but it is similar to a click."

Will felt the ghost of pain on his feet just thinking about the sound. "Don't worry about it," he said, "It doesn't result in the same reaction, I just feel... anticipation, like I have to pay close attention." In truth, every noise and movement of Hannibal's mouth was riveting. His mouth was far more expressive than his austere eyes, and Will was drawn to it like flies to honey.

Hannibal's lips curled into a smile. "Good. I always want you to pay attention to me."

"Narcissist," Will said playfully.

"Guilty."

Two plates were set before them, one with thinly sliced ovals of toast that reminded Will of crostini, and the other he found completely unrecognizable. "Pan with garrotxa cheese," their waitress explained. "And a new tortilla dish."

Hannibal rattled off a number of tapas to the waitress. Will eyed the triangles of what looked like omelette topped with thin slices of raw red fish. "That doesn't look like any tortilla I've seen before," he said with a quirk of his brow.

"In Spain the tortilla is a wedge of fried egg and potato, similar only in shape to its Mexican counterpart," Hannibal explained. He picked up the tomato-smeared cheesy toast with his hands and took a neat bite.

Will followed suit. "So this actually is finger food," he mused.

Hannibal finished the pan and moved his attentions to the tortilla, picking up his knife and fork to transport one of the triangles to his plate. "I thought a casual environment would suit our first date," he said.

Will chuckled. "Yes -- I don't have to struggle to chose between three forks and instead have to intuit which appetizer is finger food or not." He was just teasing, as Hannibal was obviously showing him what to do with each dish. "This is a date," he said quietly.

"It is," Hannibal affirmed. "Our method of approach has been quite unconventional. I find it strange that I have not taken you out before. Perhaps under other circumstances, I would have had the pleasure of wooing you over a tour of Baltimore's prime restaurants."

"A circumstance under which I would have been receptive to such dates?" Will asked. "Not sure I can imagine that. I would have been terribly awkward."

"I like to think I could engineer a situation in which your desire to please me would outweigh your social anxiety."

"Of course you'd think that." It was hard to imagine another circumstance that would have brought them together because, for the entire duration of their acquaintanceship, Will was at war with his own mind. Their relationship seemed inextricably linked with his ailing mental state. "Instead, we

skipped straight to the exchange of power," Will said, rising his glass to his lips and looking at Hannibal through his lashes. "And bondage."

A flash of teeth, eyes burning darkly. "We are not conventional men," Hannibal said.

Will lifted his glass. "To being unconventional."

They clinked their glasses together and eyed each other as they sipped the white wine. More tapas came, and Hannibal acquainted Will with the wine poached chorizo, croquettes, fried peppers, stuffed dates, and skewered shrimp and mango. Will found himself enjoying the array of deceptively simple and artfully displayed appetizers, and found new flavor combinations by trying one food after another.

"Speaking of being unconventional," Hannibal said casually, "how do you want me to violate you?"

Will's cheeks turned ruddy and it was only by sheer force of will that he didn't choke on a croquette. He glanced around, hiding his blush behind his wine glass. "I, uh. Didn't think we would talk about specifics here."

"No one is listening," Hannibal said.

"Still," Will said cautiously. "They could."

"Does the prospect worry you?" Hannibal asked, stroking the stem of his wineglass in a completely indecent manner. "Or does it also excite you?"

Will forced his eyes away from Hannibal's fingers on the glass stem. Let the game begin. "You want me to play at functionality," Will said, not answering the teasing question, "while asking you to sink your teeth in me."

"This is foreplay," Hannibal said, "And a convenient time to discuss such matters if you want to peruse that scene tonight." He plucked a piece of chorizo from its ceramic bowl and placed it on his tongue before sliding the small skewer between his lips.

Will rubbed his neck and looked around the restaurant. *Tonight*. His heart rate picked up at the thought. None of the other patrons would hear them, but the wait staff was always circling to refill their water. He turned his eyes back to Hannibal. It was daring to say such things aloud, let alone in public. It felt wrong. Dirty. Amusing, like they were deceiving everyone in the restaurant with their bespoke suits and controlled mannerisms. "I want you..." Will began to say, but the words burned up in his mouth. He bit his lip. Couldn't say the word, which ached unsaid between them. "I've thought about how we would do it."

"As have I," Hannibal purred. He had ceased eating and his full attention was on Will.

"How do you think we should arrange the scene?" Will asked. "What do you think I want out of it?"

Hannibal pursed his lips and lifted his chin, boldly assessing Will from across the table. When he spoke his words were heavy with lust and the promise of violence. "I think you want to struggle," he said. "You want to fight against me and be overcome. For that reason we should not begin with you at an extreme disadvantage; we will not start with you tied to my bed. That would be too easy."

Will have a small nod, the hairs on the back of his neck pricking and warmth pooling in his gut. Hannibal continued, saying, "The only advantage I would give myself is one of surprise."

Will swallowed against a dry mouth. "What do you mean?" he asked, though the implications of what Hannibal said were playing before his eyes, making his pulse thump heavily in his abdomen.

Hannibal uncrossed his legs, his shoe brushing Will's calf, silently pleased with the way Will tried to control his response to the touch, eyes closing in concentration, jaw working. "Let us say," Hannibal began, "that we return to my home after we have finished our tapas, and I let you enter first, to bathe and prepare for bed. Alone in the quiet of my home. I can be very silent when I want to be. You would not know that I had entered the house until I had my hands on you."

All the blood in Will was traveling south, leaving him light-headed, lips parted. "And then?" he asked, enraptured.

Hannibal leaned forward slightly, lips curling into a smile around his words. "And then I would have to restrain you," he said in a voice more like a growl. "Because you will not stop struggling against me until I have forced you into exhaustion."

Will pinched both of his lips together between teeth, something tightly coiled beginning to rattle against the cage of his chest. Hannibal's words were hot against his ears, down the skin of his neck. For a moment his eyes fluttered shut as the tide of his fantasies threatened to take him under -- Hannibal grunting with exertion, Will screaming into sheets, skin tearing under nails -- but Will snapped his eyes open, dark with fear and pleasure. "That's... similar to what I was thinking," Will said. "You'll have to take me down."

"What is the story that has lead us to this point?" Hannibal asked. "Am I to be myself or a faceless assailant?"

Will glanced down, and busied himself with smoothing the napkin in his lap. "I want you to be yourself. I'm not interested in acting."

"Then we should assume a situation adjacent to our own," Hannibal replied. "Why would I do this to you?"

Will clenched the cloth napkin. For a moment, fingernails bit into flesh. "A punishment," he whispered. "Or -- no. Not a punishment. You think I need it, but I've refused you. After all --" He lifted his eyes, defiant. "You know what's best for me."

And I will take what you give me.

Hannibal's smile was dark and delighted, growing glacially on his face, and Will felt himself smile at the sight. Around others Will might grin wildly but briefly, or mirror their own smiles reflexively with ones that didn't reach his eyes; but with Hannibal the genuine smiles were subtle, emerging like the light of dawn, so slow it was imperceptible until it was there. Like a realization. A secretly shared joke, just for the two of them. Hannibal's amber eyes, sometimes so close to red it made Will dizzy, were too strange for the light of his smile to reach. It was one of the few tells of his flat affect.

His eyes didn't smile, but they did hunger.

In a rare moment, Hannibal looked away first, eyes sliding to the middle distance as he considered the edge of the table. Pensively, he tasted his bottom lip. Will nearly forgot what he had said to prompt Hannibal's contemplation. In the stretch of silence, their water was refilled, Will giving the waitperson a nod of thanks.

Parting his lips, Hannibal telegraphed that he was prepared to speak, but his eyes only lifted after he had said the words. "Will -- do you trust me?"

A sharp chord struck in Will's chest, a feeling adjacent to fear and longing. Hannibal's face was blank -- guarding himself from Will's answer? Giving Will the space to answer without pressuring his response? Hannibal could shield his emotional reactions but Will always thought about how Hannibal wanted him to respond to questions such as these, and how Hannibal expected him to respond; and he was filled with a baffling certainty that Hannibal *didn't* want Will to trust him. That Will should resist. But even if Hannibal wanted Will to dissent, didn't Will trust him? Didn't Will continually place himself in Hannibal's control?

"I'm not sure that's the right question," Will said with a puzzled smile. "Which is maybe a roundabout way of saying 'yes, but'."

"It is not a question I would normally ask," Hannibal confessed. "But I want to know how you would answer it."

"How I would answer it," Will repeated. "Not just my answer. Abigail asked me the same question, you know. Whether or not I trust you."

Hannibal waited for him to continue.

"I told her that even if I don't trust you, I act as though I do. I put myself in your hands and wait and see if you will..." He searched for the words. "Drop me."

"I hope you will be waiting a long time," Hannibal said, the jest falling flat, like some part of the expression hadn't fully loaded.

Will squinted at him. The walls in Hannibal's mind were rising up, or maybe Will was just too close to them. "Why are you asking?"

"We are about to engage in a exercise that requires enormous amount of trust," Hannibal said. An obvious explanation that Will saw through at once.

"Hannibal."

Hannibal closed his eyes briefly and took a slow breath. When he opened them, Will found them fathomless. "There are times when I want to tell you everything in my ability, and like a breached dam, submerge you. You speak of dropping you and I think of -- how some breaks cannot be reforged. How certain words said cannot be taken back."

Despite Hannibal's vulnerability, Will was amused. He certainly could be melodramatic. "You probably want to wait until the perfectly orchestrated moment to tell me such things," he said.

"I do."

Will smiled broadly, casting his eyes down to his wineglass. "Careful, Hannibal," he said. "You'll make it sound as if you fear my rejection."

He did. Impossibly, Hannibal Lecter, brilliant surgeon and psychiatrist, extraordinary chef with enough self confidence to display Leda and the Swan in his dining room, was worried that Will would reject him. It was so common and relatable; and it also measured Hannibal's high regard for Will. Dual affection and pride colored his cheeks, and he resisted telling Hannibal he was absolutely ridiculous.

"All things in due time," Hannibal said.

° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° °

They ordered another round of tapas and talked through the details, Will drinking freely and Hannibal nursing his second glass. Will found himself saying yes to every proposal, wanting to be free of all limits, and Hannibal didn't chastise him. Even things that sounded uncomfortable and without pleasure excited Will. The point was to be uncomfortable, fearful, ruined. The point was to move beyond what Will could handle and then survive.

They weren't usually so explicit in negotiating safety. Hannibal's narcissism meant he thought he always knew best, and Will's self-destructive streak meant he didn't dissuade him of that assumption, and fortunately they hadn't truly hurt each other. But now they were wading in to dangerous territory, so Hannibal was being cautious -- and continuing their foreplay. Biting hard? Yes. Strangulation? Yes. Forced orgasm?

Yes.

Yes.

Yes.

Every hair on his skin was standing on end. Will kept forgetting to close his mouth; Hannibal kept staring at his lips, teeth, and tongue. For a scene of this intensity they decided to use color code as well, green for 'continue', yellow for 'unsure', and red for 'stop'. Red for when Will felt himself breaking unbearably. Of course, at that point Hannibal could decide to continue if he thought it was best. Obsidian remained the final tether to cut. Even as they discussed the code, Will knew he wouldn't use it without prompting.

Give me everything.

Take it all away.

Yes.

There was only one line that Will drew. "No bottles," Will said, swallowing down a lump in his throat.

Hannibal frowned at Will's sudden discomfort. "Alright. I had not considered using objects."

"The... toys are fine," Will said, words stumbling out of his mouth in a self-conscious need to explain. "But I don't... want *her* to be there."

"Was she the reason you want to pursue a non-consensual scene?" Hannibal asked.

Will winced. "Sort of? Maybe? I don't think I'm using this to try to understand her or anything, more like to exorcise. I'm sorry, I didn't think you would want a serial killer in bed with us, I didn't even want to mention it."

Hannibal chuckled. "We are always taking a killer in bed with us, on some level."

"I tend to carry them around." He smiled sheepishly.

"Do not fret. Thank you for telling me."

And then they were sipping a desert wine and eating spicy chocolate mousse, conversation replaced with alternatively longing and mischievous looks.

And then Hannibal was driving them in his Bentley, Will breathing open-mouthed as waves of apprehension and deadly hot anticipation roiled inside him. Hannibal's grip was hard on the steering wheel. Will sank in the seat and pressed his temple against the cold window -- fear, disgust, arousal, shame for wanting this, and then shame for the part of him that still rejected his desires. "I don't want this," Will said miserably, frustrated, a hard lump in his throat. "I want to be normal, I want to go on dates with you like a normal couple, I'm so fucking tired of feeling unsafe in my own head."

Hannibal said nothing. Will could feel how incredibly tense his body was as if it were radiating out from him.

"I hate this," Will whispered. "I hate myself."

Always at war with himself. Always. But he no longer feared that he was going to ruin this. Will brushed the tears from his eyes before they fell. He didn't want to cry in front of Hannibal unless he was pushed to that point, but even more than that he didn't want to shut Hannibal out. So he forced himself to speak. "I'm sorry," he said. "I don't have your easy self-acceptance. There's still a lot of shame."

"I understand," Hannibal said curtly. "We don't have to do the scene tonight."

"Have we started the roleplay?" Will said, trying to sound playful.

"I am entirely serious."

"I know. I want to do this, though. I'm sure."

Hannibal relaxed a bit, eyes locked on the road. Will sat up straight and placed a hand on Hannibal's thigh, the muscles tight. He rubbed gently, focusing on easing the physical tension there, like it might soothe the lash of his volatile mood. "Do you want to go through with it tonight?" Will asked.

"I do."

"Alright."

Hannibal pulled into the drive. They sat in the car in silence for some minutes, letting the dark settle around them. Will looked at Hannibal -- his hands were folded neatly in his lap and his eyes were closed, reminding Will of a large cat resting but not asleep.

"Are you here with me?" Will asked softly.

"Yes," came the reply, Hannibal hardly stirring. "Always."

Will didn't know what to say. The walls were up, maybe they had to be. All that delicious anticipating that had built over dinner had vanished, pushed out by Will's uncertainty. No, not uncertainty. Shame. For so long, his whole life really, he had denied himself what he wanted, rebuking desires to protect himself from the pain of wanting and being denied. From the inherent vulnerability of want, and, now, the impossibility of wanting the forbidden. Will said it in his mind, over and over, until it felt real.

I want you to rape me.

Will shivered. He unbuckled his seatbelt and turned in his seat to Hannibal, who was still as a statue. Tenderly, Will reached for his face, stroking high cheekbones. Hannibal turned under the touch and Will pressed their lips together, soft, again and again, Hannibal's curled lips opening easily to Will's probing tongue, showing Hannibal his hunger, his desire. Hannibal matched his kiss, sucking his lip, tongues dancing and pressing together. Will released his mouth with a sigh.

Now Hannibal's eyes were open, searching Will's.

"I want you," Will breathed. "Please don't hold back."

A spark in Hannibal's eyes, hidden in the dark recess of his brow. A lure in dark waters, a line to tug Will into the abyss. Hannibal handed Will the house keys.

Will got out of the car. Walked to the front door and let himself in, hanging up his coat in the dark and taking off his shoes. He went to the kitchen and turned on the lights there, getting himself a glass of water. It was strange to be in this house without Hannibal. Eerily quiet. Will knew his way around the place and where most things were supposed to go, so he didn't feel out of place or unwelcome. But it was entirely Hannibal's territory.

Lavish decorations. Hardwood under his feet. Carved molding etched with shadows. The muted hum of kitchen electronics and heaters. Not a piece of plastic in sight.

Will went upstairs, not bothering to turn on lights as he went until he got to the bedroom. He switched on a lamp, and moved to the closet to undress and hang up his suit. Naked, he padded over to the bathroom, closing the door behind him but not locking it. Turning on the shower. Stepping into the hot spray, the water cascading down his body, the sound filling his head. No thoughts, just the inevitable relaxation of muscles under hot water. Will scrubbed himself clean. Washed his hair with Hannibal's fancy shampoo and conditioner. Showered longer than usual, until his body was filled with warmth and laziness. Stepped out of the shower and onto the warm tiles. Dried himself off with an expensive towel. Wrapped said towel around his waist and went to the sink.

No sound from the house reached the bathroom, if there was any sound to be heard. Will brushed his teeth and rinsed his mouth. He looked at himself in the huge mirror over the sink, and for the first time since he entered the house, felt the edge of anticipation press like a knife against his

throat. The man in the mirror in front of him looked comfortable but vulnerable, like that comfort was hard won. A respite from the stress that left him marked with bags under his eyes and sallow skin. He ran his hand over the faded bruises on his shoulders and chest, the pink indentstions of teeth long gone. In need of replacement. It suited him, to look wounded.

Will walked to the bathroom door and unlocked it. He hesitated before opening it; it was difficult not to force down his survival instincts since he knew Hannibal would be attacking him at some point in the night. The shower would have provided a cover of noise. He could be on the other side of the door.

Taking a deep breath, Will pushed the door open and stepped out into the bedroom. No one was in sight. Hand still on the doorknob, he strained his ears, but heard no movement in the house. Cautiously, he moved through the room to the walk in closet, which he had left open, glancing around him. He startled at the door of the closet, for a moment mistaking a hanging suit for a figure, heart hammering in his chest.

Will chuckled quietly at himself, and retrieving a pair of pajama pants. After pulling them on he listened again, and again there was silence. His heart still beat furiously. Will walked back out into the bedroom.

He had only taken a few steps towards the bed when someone wrapped their arm around his neck. Will cried out in shock, and twisted in the grasp, but the crook of the elbow squeezed against his throat and Will was held tightly. Realization that it was Hannibal came a moment later, but he couldn't breathe, the grip was relentless. Will scratched at the arm around his neck, stamping his bare feet down on Hannibal's shoes, but it was no use -- Hannibal bent backwards and lifted Will on his feet, and his face was bright red, and black edged his vision, he needed air --

Will made himself go limp before he actually passed out, fighting the instincts and the adrenaline pumping through him. Hannibal held on for a moment longer and then loosened his grip, wrapping his other arm around Will's arm and chest to keep him from falling. Will forced himself not to gasp for breath but to take the oxygen in slow, and Hannibal began lowering them to the ground.

Will thrashed and elbowed Hannibal in the chest, making him grunt, and spinning in that direction to escape his grasp. Hannibal snatched at him, but Will somehow got his feet under him and pushed away, stumbling to the door, gasping for breath that rushed painful and raw into his lungs.

Will's legs went out from under him and he fell to the ground, failing to properly brace himself for the fall, tasting blood. Hannibal yanked him back by his legs and then he was on top of him, twisting an arm behind Will's back. His shoulder burned sharply and Will howled, lifting his chest up to ease some of the pain.

"Why do you run from me?" Hannibal growled, his grip on his wrist so hard it was sure to bruise. Hannibal pressed his weight into Will's hips, already fully hard, holding himself up with the other arm so he could look down at his prey.

"You scared me," Will hissed between clenched teeth. "You fucking choked me!"

Hannibal clicked his tongue, and bent Will's hand back until he cried out. "Language," he crooned.

"Get off me!" Will snapped. "What the -- what are you doing?"

"Oh, you know what it is I'm doing, Will," Hannibal purred, grinding down onto Will's ass. "You asked me for this, and I'm going to give it to you."

Will pressed his forehead to the carpet, eyes shut tight. His shoulder ached terribly, and if he struggled Hannibal would wrench it again. "I didn't mean--" he started to say.

"Quiet."

The word cut through Will like ice.

"I know what you want, Will," Hannibal said, voice laden with venom and honey. "Even if you lie to yourself, even if you lie to me. You want to be used."

Will shuddered head to toe, told himself it was Hannibal's gut-wrenching growl, the pain and the fear. Hannibal laid down on top of him, breathing hard against his neck, and snaked his other hand under Will's chest. "I'm going to fuck you until you scream." He pinched a nipple hard and Will jerked. "Until you beg me to stop." Hannibal pulled at it, twisted the nub, and Will choked down on a scream, legs kicking uselessly. "Until you beg me never to stop." Hannibal pinched and pulled at Will's other nipple and the pain flared in his chest. Hot. Without pleasure. Hannibal sucked at his neck with a low growl, scratching down his chest.

"My shoulder, please," Will gasped.

Hannibal pulled Will's pajamas down just under his ass and slid his clothed erection up and down between his cheeks. He undid his suit pants and shoved them down too, and began to rut skin to skin.

"Wait, Hannibal --" Will gasped. It was too fast, Hannibal's huge hard cock heavy against him, while Will was cold, flaccid, shivering with pain. "I changed my mind," Will said desperately. "I don't want to hurt anymore. Please don't hurt me."

God, he was so tired of hurting.

Hannibal moaned as if Will's words turned him on, and bit his shoulder. "Liar," Hannibal hissed, anger turning his voice dark. "You harmed yourself on purpose and lied to me about it. You want this." He spread Will's cheeks and slid his cock deeper in between them, brushing against his hole. Will gasped, his own cock twitching in response. Hannibal's weight was kept on his twisted arm, and he could feel the muscle tearing. Hannibal's other hand was on his ass.

A dry thumb pressed against Will's entrance and fear shot through him, freezing his veins. He was going to, he was really going to. Will had hardly had the chance to fight him off. Hannibal rubbed the tight muscle. He didn't even bother with his own spit. He wanted it to hurt. "Stop!" Will cried as Hannibal pierced him with the tip of his thumb, burning him. Stretching him roughly. Will ground his teeth together as Hannibal thrust his whole thumb inside, moving in circles to stretch him wider.

"You smell amazing," Hannibal sighed, lapping and sucking bruises to Will's neck. "Fear, adrenaline."

"Fuck you," Will snarled. "Get the fuck off me."

Hannibal removed his thumb, and clicked his tongue. He thrust into Will with two fingers, and his vision went white with the sudden pain. Hannibal speared Will open again and again, his rim

burning with the dry penetration, making Will hiss and try to shift away. He got his hand in Hannibal's hair and pulled hard -- Hannibal grunted in pain and twisted Will's wrist. The bedroom filled with howls and grunting. Will grew dizzy with the pain in his shoulder, and then Hannibal bit him on the back of the neck, jaw clamping down and shooting cold down his spine. Will whimpered and his fingers fell from ashen locks. Hannibal dug his fingers in. Growled as his teeth broke skin.

And then his fingers were gone and Hannibal shifted. Will felt the head of his cock rub up and down his cleft, catching on his reddened rim, and all the air went out of him. He was struck, frozen, a thousand knives pressed against his skin, waiting to cut. The panic rose in him like bile.

"Color," Hannibal said, low and controlled.

"God," Will keened, breath spasming in his chest. He didn't know -- it didn't feel good -- he was fucking terrified. "Yellow," he choked out. "Green. I don't know, Hannibal please --"

Will felt pressure as his entrance. He was panicking, stuttering, Hannibal was trying to push in and it hurt, it was nothing like before. "Aaahh -- nng! You can't, I can't take it."

Hannibal released Will's wrist, and in the moment of relief from that loss of that pain, he pushed in.

It was like breaking skin.

A sickening pain Will felt in every bone.

It was shattering.

Hannibal was seated just inside of him, hissing with the raw tightness then groaning obscenely. His hand pressed on the back of Will's neck and he sunk in a few more inches, the friction drawing another scream from Will. "You feel so good like this," Hannibal muttered, sinking deeper. "My Will. Mine."

Hannibal snapped his hips forward and buried himself to the hilt. It wasn't the same fullness as before. Will didn't feel melded, he felt impaled -- filled with poisonous tar, forced to accommodate Hannibal. Forced. Hannibal began to fuck into him slowly, the friction overwhelming for them both. Hannibal had never felt so large inside him. So wrong. So devastating.

"Color," Hannibal ordered again.

Will retracted his arm from behind his back and it fell limp by his side. "Yellow." it was barely a whimper.

Hannibal took a deep breath and continued his short, slow thrusts. Each one made Will whimper and keen deep in his throat, his whole body alight with sparks of pain and deeply uncomfortable overstimulation. His mind wandered to the cell of his fantasies, his face pressed into concrete instead of carpet, Hannibal forced to watch instead of the assailant. How at a certain point when he's penetrated he just gives up, disappears and lets it happen. Maybe he should just go away. Go limp.

No.

With a flash of unexpected stamina Will surged forward and knocked an elbow back in Hannibal's face, the satisfying hit loosening Hannibal's hands and letting Will pull himself off his cock, vision going white but adrenaline urging him to scramble forward onto limp legs. When his vision cleared Will was slumped against the wall, Hannibal rising to his feet, kicking off his pants, cock hard and furiously red against his naval. Will ran towards the hallway, legs burning like he'd just run a marathon, but Hannibal was on him in seconds, grabbing him around the waist and hauling him up off the ground. Will thrashed, Hannibal dragged, until he was thrown onto the beg.

Hannibal grabbed his throat. Nails dug in.

"Stop," Hannibal growled, "Or this will be far more painful."

Will sobbed. Arched and writhed against the man over him. Hannibal held himself away from Will's blows, and squeezed down. Will was dizzy, the adrenaline fogging his head, igniting the panic. His limbs filled with lead. Sluggish. Hannibal slapped him, stunned him. He was rolled over on the mattress. His hands were tied behind his back. Will didn't even register when Hannibal had gotten the rope.

"So wild," Hannibal gasped. "You need to be tamed, don't you. I wonder if I can, or if I'll just break you." Hannibal rubbed his cock against Will's raw hole, groaning deep in his chest. "Look how beautiful you are like this."

Hannibal forced himself in. Burning him open, spearing through. The thud of his cock deep inside him was thunderous, excruciating. Hannibal thrust into him, finding his rhythm now that Will couldn't escape. The slap of skin on skin and grunts of pain and pleasure filled the bedroom.

"So good for me," Hannibal slurred. "Like you were meant to be used by me."

The praise slithered it's way in, igniting shame and pleasure. Will was a broken locking mechanism -- coming in and out of his body in waves, the disconnect only a temporary relief before he snapped back into sharp sensation. Never quite floating away. Hannibal angled himself and started rubbing against Will's prostate and Will snarled and cursed him. The discomfort was too much but then it kept growing, nails scratching on concrete under his skin. He was getting hard in Hannibal's hand despite everything, inescapable as the probing of his prostate, and the pressure, god.

It got easier as Hannibal fucked him steadily, but his abused rim still stung with every thrust. Hannibal lifted his hips up, yanking Will back on his cock, over and over. It was so different from the way they usually had sex because Hannibal was entirely focused on his own pleasure -- and increasing Will's discomfort. Hannibal was louder than usual, growling and moaning almost like an animal and it made Will leak against the sheets.

Distantly, Will wondered how Hannibal was still going. He thought it would be over by now.

Oh.

The pills.

Will groaned as he realized just what he was in store for. "Please," he gasped. "Stop."

Hannibal halted his thrusts, deep inside Will. He stroked and squeezed his ass. Relief washed over Will and he began to babble. "Please get lube, do something different, no more of this, god."

"But you're already stretched so nicely around me." Hannibal thumbed the reddened skin where they met, a bit slick now with his precome. "You've leaned to accommodate me."

Hannibal circled his hips and Will saw stars. "Please," Will begged, "use my mouth instead."

Hannibal gasped softly, and snapped his hips once. "You filthy thing," he said in wonder. "Using one hole isn't enough for you, is it?"

"That's not what I fucking mean," Will snarled, and Hannibal laughed. He slid out of Will, and Will collapsed on his stomach, sobbing into his pillow in relief. He felt empty and his body ached in so many ways, but the onslaught had ceased, for now. Hannibal was moving around him, and Will heard the opening of the medical bag and shifting of supplies. He should run, he would run, just after another moment of lying on the bed, just another breath --

Hannibal adjusted his body as easily as if Will were a doll. He bent him over the edge of the bed with his knees on the floor and sat behind him, rubbing his hands up and down his back. Will hated that it was comforting. Will heard the click of a lube bottle being opened and sank into his disappointment. But it wasn't Hannibal's cock that pressed against his entrance, but something smaller, hard and cold but mercifully slick as it was pushed into him. Oh. Not so small after all, just narrow at the tip. Will groaned as he was forced to stretch around the plug until he hit the base. His rim stung still but at least now he was slicked up, and his prostate wasn't being abused. The discomfort plaguing his body was beginning to transform.

Hannibal sat on the edge of the bed so Will's head was in his lap. He stroked the younger man's curls, brushing them away from where they stuck sweaty to Will's forehead. "You've done so well, my darling boy," Hannibal said. "You've earned some of your own pleasure." Hannibal fisted his curls lightly and moved his head upright, guiding him to his cock. "Open," he commanded.

Will opened his eyes to see the red, bulbous head of Hannibal's cock slipped free of foreskin, leaking precome and throbbing. The thing that had just ravaged him, that was so hard for him -- fuck. Will opened his mouth wide and stuck out his tongue, and Hannibal guided him closer to smear his cock head around Will's lips and tongue, making both of them groan. Will strained against the hand in his hair and licked at Hannibal's cock, sucking the tip between his lips. Growing delirious. So thankful that Hannibal wasn't fucking him anymore but aching pleasantly from the memory. Maybe if he did well enough Hannibal would have mercy on him.

A distant part of Will laughed at how easily he had given in.

Hannibal shifted forward so his cock rested heavy on Will's tongue, and Will wrapping his lips around the shaft instinctively. Hannibal moved his head up and down. Will's hands twitched where they were bound behind him and his back arched, sucking as hard as he could and massaging the underside of Hannibal's cock with his tongue, and he moaned in relief -- because this was relief, wasn't it? Hannibal using his mouth, uttering soft words of praise in other languages, sliding between his lips, Will giving into it entirely, giving up. He was really hard now, leaking onto the carpet. Hannibal stilled Will's head with both hands and began to fuck into his mouth, pressing so deep Will immediately began choking. He gagged and his throat was forced open, eyes watering. Hannibal was on his feet now, driving into Will's throat, past the choking point, he couldn't breathe, the taste and feel of Hannibal filled him up entirely--

Will was close. Moaned obscenely around Hannibal's cock. The pace punishing, the edges of his vision going black. Hannibal hissed something unintelligible and Will looked up, saw a flash of his furrowed brow and disheveled hair as he held Will and thrust in --

Will came and lost all sensation to it.

Everything came back in shuddering waves of static. He was panting for breath. Hannibal's face floating in and out of focus. Caressing his face, kissing him. Hannibal wrapped himself around him. Was it over? Hannibal fiddled with the plug as Will slumped against him. Breathed.

The vibrations screamed through his body, dragging Will back to reality. "God!" he howled, jerking forward into Hannibal's arms. "Fuck, no, please." Tears leaked from his eyes as his insides burned with molten gold, the vibrations overwhelming after his recent orgasm, and Will dissolved into a shuddering mess, whimpering and gnawing on Hannibal's shoulder, begging him to turn it off. Hannibal held and caressed, licking the sweat from his neck and muttering foreign poetry into his skin.

Hannibal kissed him, lapping up his begging and invading his mouth. Will could barely parse the sensations over the devastating vibrations wracking his body. Hannibal tugged his lower lip between teeth, sucking hard. Held Will close. Grasped him as if he were something precious. Adjusted the angle of the plug until the vibrations became a liquid ache. Lavished him with wet kisses until Will was hard again

After the realization, Will would remember the night in broken fragments, as if his mind retroactively decided the memory too overwhelming to bear.

Sucking on Hannibal's fingers while he thrust back on the plug in search of something to take the edge away.

Hannibal stroking them together. Will coming weakly all over his hand and cock.

Hannibal's face so fucking beautiful in the way it contorted in his exertion, biting a grimace.

The roll of his shoulders and back as he thrust into Will.

Feeing limp as a doll.

Hannibal's finger sliding in alongside his cock, cooing words of encouragement as he broke Will anew.

A glimpse of the mirror as his face rubbed against silk sheets.

Hannibal holding him upright in the shower, cleaning and inspecting him for damage with such care.

Crying as the knot inside himself unraveled.

And Hannibal's eyes, dark and deadly and impossibly red, cutting away his every tether.

Trauma was funny that way.

After Will realized (a realization like God casting Lucifer down, a fall with no end, only an ever expanding abyss) that night would become mixed up with nights he didn't remember. What Hannibal had done to him in his sleep, under hypnosis. Fuel for the trauma. Everything mixed up. Will remembered wanting to tell Hannibal that he loved him.

He prayed to god that he hadn't.

Chapter End Notes

tldr; hannibal and will go to a tapas restaurant for their first date and negotiate their scene (in public! schandalous!) the scene goes well but there's a little bit of foreshadowing:

After the realization, Will would remember the night in broken fragments, as if his mind retroactively decided the memory too overwhelming to bear.

Smoking Mirror

Chapter Summary

The black mirror is not good to look into; it does not make one appear good. When someone uses such a mirror, from it is to be seen a distorted mouth, swollen eyelids, thick lips. Perhaps the obsidian mirror reveals the inner self; it is open to debate whether the alternative image one views in the obsidian mirror is more or less valid than our ordinary perceptions of reality.

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Will sees the Marionette, and loses time.

Chapter Notes

I didn't cry while writing this chapter, but it was a close thing. tears will be for the coming chapters.

we are approaching the end of this fic. there are about six chapters left, depending on length. everything has been wound up and now spins out of control. welcome to the climax -- its going to be long and slow and devastating.

thank you so much for reading. your comments make my day and I haven't been responding to all of them bc most of the time all I know how to say is /blush blush/ thank you /sob/. seriously you are all fantastic and I'm so grateful that you're reading this. say hi to me on tumblr

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will woke to the soft light of morning glowing in the bedroom and Hannibal's sleeping form beneath the charcoal duvet. It was rare for Will to wake first and catch Hannibal still in bed, so he soaked up the sight of the other man breathing softly, his hairy chest rising and falling. Without the piercing intellect of his waking mind he looked softer, more knowable, like the fortress was laid bare. An illusion of vulnerability.

Will snuggled closer, resting his head on Hannibal's shoulder and wrapping an arm around his chest. Even moving a little bit told Will just how sore he was, as a deep and sharp ache in his lower back awakening. It was alright; everything was soft at the edges in the small haven of morning before either of them would truly need to be awake.

Hannibal adjusted against him sleepily, wrapping a hand around Will's waist and burying his face in his curls, letting out a deep, contented hum. "Good morning," he said in a rumble so deep the words hardly formed.

"Morning." Will sighed and snuggled closer, Hannibal's heartbeat strong against his ear. He trailed his fingers up and down his side, just enjoying exploring the contours of his body.

"How do you feel?" Hannibal asked.

"Lazy," Will responded. "Amazing. Incredibly sore."

"Hmmm." Hannibal smiled and stroked his hip.

"You like making it so I can't walk properly for days, don't you?"

"You like it when I take care of you."

Will grinned into Hannibal's chest and gave him a playful nip. "How do you feel?"

"I am in awe," Hannibal said, twisting to kiss and speak against Will's forehead. "Waking up with you in my bed often strikes me as miraculous. That the universe would conspire for our paths to cross, amongst all possibilities. That we are granted this time together."

Will felt his heart expanding. He tilted his head back to glance at Hannibal's face, reaching up to touch his jaw. He could feel his breath on his lips. "Narcissistic and romantic," he teased. "What a catch."

Hannibal kissed him softly. "I will check your injuries and then bring you breakfast. I'm keeping you in bed for the morning at least."

"In a minute," Will said, running his nails up through Hannibal's short hair. "Stay in bed a while."

Hannibal grinned. "Since you insist."

o o o o o o o o o o

Hannibal catalogued Will's wounds like a collection of ornaments, each a snapshot in the wing of his mind palace dedicated to the man. The bite mark on the back of Will's neck was framed with livid red bruises from where Hannibal had choked him. Where the skin had broken from his incisors and canines, Hannibal applied antiseptic and a large bandage. For the swollen muscle of Will's shoulder he massaged in a cool ointment. His back was littered with bruises from where Hannibal had sucked and bit him, no pattern to it, simply where Hannibal found convenient when the urge to claim Will became overwhelming. He made sure to touch each and press down so that Will knew where they were.

There were slight abrasions on his wrists from where the ropes had rubbed against skin. Those too were cleaned and bandaged. Will's hips and waist were covered in small bruises in the shape of Hannibal's clutching fingers, and where he had grasped Will so roughly the night before, he now soothed with gentle touches. Will sighed into the pillow, still unused to and slightly aroused by the attention of being cared for. It was marvelous how Will was sensitive to touch yet could endure so much.

When Hannibal spread his legs and cheeks to assess him, Will hissed sharply. Hannibal bent close to examine him. "There's a small fissure," he said clinically, though he felt anything but. "I'm going to apply an ointment."

"Yeah it, uh. Stings a lot," Will said, blushing into the pillow.

He had tried not to hurt Will in that way, though he understood that it was a possibility. Harming Will in such an intimate place as a result of his own lustful abandon was... interesting. Hannibal noted the cold feeling of anger towards himself and the bloodlust and set them both aside. Sometimes an artist's hand slipped, and the subsequent misstep must be incorporated into the whole picture. Hannibal always accounted for risk, variation, and instinct.

In some ways the small tear was a deeper mark than the scars Hannibal had already left on Will. He would be feeling it for weeks, and their activities would be limited while it healed. As Hannibal mused on the nature of the skin as barrier, he fetched the ointment from the bathroom.

"We will have to refrain from certain kinds of sex while it heals," Hannibal explained as he sat between Will's legs again and pulled on a latex glove.

"Is it bad?" Will asked.

"Not at all," Hannibal replied, parting Will's cheeks again. "It's so small I didn't notice it while I cleaned you last night. Nothing to be worried about." He put some ointment on his gloved finger and rubbed it around Will's rim. Will hissed again, his whole back clenching up. "There are other activities we can engage in, of course."

"Hah, yeah. A break from. Um. Bottoming sounds really good right now."

Hannibal gave his ass an affectionate squeeze when he was done.

"So are you, uh." Will peeked down at Hannibal, still blushing. "I was wondering if you ever wanted me to top."

"Is that something you would like?" Hannibal threw his glove away and moved to inspect Will's feet. The abrasions had all healed and the bruising was mostly gone.

"Yes," Will said. "Yeah... I do."

"Turn over please."

Will complied and Hannibal began his consideration of the wounds on his front. "At some point I would like that as well," he finally replied, tracing the edge of a bruise. "But not yet."

"Saving it for the perfect moment?" Will asked, disappointment partially hidden by the teasing remark.

Hannibal's eyes shifted down to the small fresh scars on Will's hips and upper thighs. The nail clippers had severed the skin quite cleanly, and had left eye-shaped scars. Because of how his skin stretched tightly over this region (he was somewhat underweight) Hannibal imagined how Will must have pinched up his skin to cut it with the clippers.

I'm waiting to see if you'll... drop me.

And Hannibal was waiting for Will to see and understand him. Hannibal's impatience was dangerous. It was difficult to hold back from tearing down the last barriers between them when they made love, those euphoric moments where they merged and yearned. Hannibal knew Will sensed the truth about him, could feel it bubbling up in his subconscious, misdirected by Will's vision of himself as monstrous. Hannibal wanted those scarred eyes on his flesh to open up and pierce him through.

When Hannibal looked up, Will's brows were furrowed, worried that his scars -- the marks of his disobedience and illness -- were the reason Hannibal didn't let Will penetrate him. "I am slow to relinquish control," Hannibal said. "Though I know the act of sex is not so cleanly divided into give and take, control and abandon, I still need to hold this barrier between us while all others are stripped away."

"It's really fine," Will said. "We don't ever have to, if it doesn't feel right."

"Thank you, Will," Hannibal said. He slid down on his stomach in bed and kissed the scars on Will's hip, tasting the shape of them with his tongue.

o o o o o o o o o o

It was bitter cold for the funerary service of Agent Pascal, the sun glowing dully on the snowy ground of the cemetery. Will skipped the service and lingered around the periphery of the burial, watching the mourners in black as the casket was lowered into the ground. It was a large crowd. Will recognized some of the faces from the Bureau. Bereft family members. A seething and quietly tearful wife. A numb teenage girl.

Will didn't have to look for the emotions in the crowd emotions to find the regret he felt for the two agents' deaths. It was there as a slow fuel for self loathing. If he had been there...

It's not your fault, he told himself. Alana had drilled it in his head. But Will was stubborn, and if he were better he would have been there. The third and last pig hadn't been mutilated or covered with a sheet. No one had noticed that in time.

When the body was in the ground and the people began to disperse, Jack made his way over to Will. He watched him approach out of the corner of his eye, still looking at the hole in the ground steadily filling with dirt, feeling frozen in place in more ways than one.

"I don't have time for two funerals," Jack said sharply. "And neither do you. If you can stand here and freeze your ass off, then you can work."

"Wasn't sure you wanted me," Will muttered, still staring at the grave.

"Can you make yourself useful to me?" Jack asked.

"Yes."

"Then I want you on the case."

Will ground his teeth together. "My profile was wrong. Twice. And I'm not well, Jack. If I keep forcing myself to do this, I'll make more mistakes."

Jack got in his face, but Will looked away. "First of all?" He said. "You're the best damn profiler I have. No one realized she's a woman; that's not a mistake, Will, that's damn good work. The Marionette is an intelligent psychopath and I need to be able to understand what she'll do next to catch her."

Will said nothing.

"Second of all," Jack went on, "show up functional or leave and screw your head back on. I don't care if it's Hannibal or Alana who helps you do that."

Will glanced at him finally. There was a lot going on, but beyond the anger and frustration was the determination to get the job done no matter the cost. Will could tell that the open cases were dragging on Jack, perhaps almost as much as on himself. There was an edge of desperation there, bullied away by stubbornness.

"I should have told you days ago," Will said.

"You should have told me months ago," Jack snapped. "Or however long it's been. Well, what's done is done. You and I have bigger things to worry about."

Jack stalked off through the snow-dusted graveyard, knowing Will would follow. Will watched the grave and imagined the man falling into a net of barbed wire, drowning in the bloody briar.

o o o o o o o o o o

The Marionette had left them no new lure, at least not one that was obvious. Jack sent patrols to the sites that she favored -- unused warehouses, abandoned buildings, construction sites. Will suspected that after so much activity it would be some time before she next set a trap or displayed a kill.

The 'three not-so-little pigs', as Price called them, had been full grown sow. The two that were mutilated had been pre-mortem, which meant that the Marionette needed a space to keep them alive and experiment. Way out in Virginia they found a huge freezer truck for transporting food filled with blood and abandoned tools, and the trucker's wallet and driver's license neatly displayed. His body wasn't found, but enough of his blood was mixed with the pigs' to suggest his death. He had bought the pigs alive from Verger Farms.

Will stood in front of the grid of emancipated women and searched their faces.

Will supposed that he and Hannibal were out as a couple now, though he hadn't told anyone. Nothing was too different, but Hannibal showed up at the BAU more often, bringing Will lunch which they ate in the privacy of Will's office, or if he was in the midsts of work, out in the open. Hannibal made no grand displays of public affection, merely squeezing his shoulder or resting his hand on the small of his back as they walked, occasionally brushing the hair from Will's eyes when they were alone. But they were surrounded by behavioral analysts, and everyone knew.

Will ignored Zeller's looks and Price's winks, but couldn't help but smile when Beverly muttered, "Nice catch, fisherman," in his ear as she passed him in the hall. In another life they would have all gone to a bar after work and teased Will to show their approval.

What was really different was Will returning the subtle affection and initiating his own contact with Hannibal. Rarely would it be accompanied by eye contact, but rather as offhand gestures -- a brush of fingers while exchanging documents, a hand on his shoulder as he leaned in for a word, his hands finding Hannibal for a moment of reassurance. Instead of pressing his bruises, Will touched Hannibal.

Hannibal was around more frequently as well since both he and Alana were called in to lend their perspectives to the Marionette Murderer's profile. And that was an awkward meeting -- Will seated, both psychiatrists standing and holding two conversations simultaneously: one about the profile and one about Will's health. A shadow play of words. Will doodles in the margins of his page: eyes and *ii*'s.

So many pieces that didn't fit.

So many tangled threads that Will could see the end of, but not the path.

A connection and divergence with Marie Ward.

Marcus Reyes, the sacrificial surrogate.

Will's profile of the Chesapeake Ripper.

Freddie Lounds wrote an article about the FBI's failure to capture the Marionette Murderer, speculating that the BAU's bloodhound Will Graham was losing his touch. She cited rumors about his relationship with Dr. Lecter as evidence of his instability, but thankfully there were no pictures.

Will was too focused on the hunt to care about anything else. He had anticipated repercussions for his relationship with Hannibal coming out like this, but now with three FBI dead in search of the Marionette the issue seemed so trifle. Will knew Hannibal was smoothing things over and bearing the brunt of tough conversations, inviting Jack and then Alana to private dinners to make apologies and reassurances over divine food. It helped that Will was functional.

He was soaking in the blood of pigs and men, eyes constantly tracing the path of loose cable. He was standing in motel rooms reliving cold cases, unsatisfied. The chain of *ii*'s emails flashed in his mind over Marcus's serene, dead face. But he was functional. He was focused.

And then Will got it.

He was chopping leeks in Hannibal's kitchen when the knot untangled in his mind. The knife went clattering on the counter.

Hannibal looked up to see Will wide-eyed and frozen -- and then he was moving, dashing to the foyer to grab his coat and shove on his shoes. "I need to go to the Bureau." The words poured manic from his lips. "She killed Marie Ward because that was the profile, the search parameters, except she knows she won't be caught that way. Everything was right except one thing. We know she identified with Marcus but she also looked down on him -- because he didn't escape his own trauma, he didn't cut it out. Marcus is her regret. She killed him to kill her mistake."

Hannibal followed after him. "I'll drive you," he said, and then they were out the door.

Will called Jack and told him to get a search analyst. And then he was looming over the shoulder of the data specialist, because Marcus Reyes hadn't been emancipated.

But the Marionette's brother had been.

Hey Marcus, if you're moving to Baltimore I know a few sex workers there. I can put you in touch.

Elias Reid had run away from home at 15 and emancipated himself in Atlanta a year later. His record showed a few minor infractions for sex work. Five years ago he filed for a legal sex change and name change to Eden Reid. Her younger sister Hannah had run away a few times as well, but only managed to escape her family when she was 18.

Hannah Reid's drivers license photo showed an odd-looking woman with wide set eyes and crooked features.

And Will knew.

o o o o o o o o o o

Eden sat across the table from Will looking much the same as their first interview, but visibly shaken and without any makeup. Not unexpected, since a team of armored special agents had come to her apartment expecting it to be trapped.

"What the fuck is going on?" Eden asked, gnawing at her lip. "Is this about Marcus?"

It was 1:00 in the morning. Will pushed a styrofoam cup of coffee towards her, and took a drink of his own. "When was the last time you had contact with your sister?"

Eden looked baffled. She leaned back in her chair, staring at Will as if she couldn't believe the question. "My sister?" she asked. "I haven't actually seen her in, god, it must be ten years."

"No contact since then?" Will asked.

Eden gave Will a self-deprecating smile, and picked up the coffee to take a long sip. "I don't have a family, Graham," she finally said. "Hannah tried to contact me like four years ago and I blocked her number. I blocked her *everything*. Eventually she gave up trying to reconnect." She chuckled quietly, then frowned. "What is this about?"

Will removed his glasses and folded them in his shirt pocket. Folding his hands on the table, he looked Eden in the eyes. "Your sister is a suspect in one of our cases."

Will saw in a sequence of micro expressions how confusion transformed into disbelief and then horrifying realization. "She used to play this game with her dolls," Eden whispered, all the color draining from her face.

She staggered over to the waste bin and vomited.

o o o o o o o o o o

It was 3:00am when Will was finished. He found Hannibal waiting in his office, eyes closed and hands folded in his lap, no doubt meditating; but as Will entered Hannibal took a deep breath and his eyes flicked open.

"We know who she is," Will said, sounding both exhausted and relieved.

Hannibal opened his palm to Will, who came forward and gave him his hand. Hannibal kissed his knuckles. "You are remarkable," he muttered.

Will blushed and fought back the reactions to deny it -- or to kneel before Hannibal. "You didn't have to stay," Will said. It was obvious that Hannibal was tired.

"And miss the moment of your revelation? Never." Hannibal kissed his palm, eyes gleaming with pride.

Will retracted his hand and then placed both palms on the arms of the chair, kissing Hannibal like a small victory.

o o o o o o o o o o

The rest of February passed far too quickly and the cold ceased biting as deep. There was a glimmering hope for spring and the possibility of putting away the heaviest winter coats and thickest sweaters. They hadn't caught the Marionette yet even though they had out an APB out for Hannah Reid; no doubt because she was laying low. But Will knew she wasn't finished with Baltimore, and when she dared emerge, they would be ready.

The sessions with Alana were slow going and she insisted on seeing him twice a week. Will shut down more than he meant to, and the frustration there made him push her away, a small self-destructive part of himself wanting to shock her with the truths he concealed. *Doctor Bloom, I've been having this fantasy.* Biting his tongue all session was getting uncomfortable. Alana was persistent.

They finally figured out how to talk pragmatically about what Will was going through, focusing on keeping Will functional and assessing his mental state. Will scaled down everything: sleepwalking becoming insomnia, hallucinations to intrusive thoughts, disassociation -- well, he could talk about the disassociation. It wasn't as if he was actually losing time.

He told Hannibal everything.

It would be fine if he lied to Alana so long as Hannibal was also keeping an eye on him. Alana actually helped Will in ways he hadn't expected. She reassured him when he hadn't realized he was asking to be reassured. They talked about his father and the underlying dread he felt in all his relationships, the nagging feeling of running out of time, and the pain of expectation. They always

talked around Hannibal, Will speaking to relationships as a concept and maneuvering conversations away. He was protective, and still a bit angry that Alana had come between them, even if her reasons were fair.

Will thought he was maybe getting better.

And then, as the ice of deep winter began to crack, Will woke in his own bed drenched in sweat, gasping for air as he emerged from the nightmare. His phone had awoken him, and as he clutched his chest to stay the panic, he answered Jack's call.

A body had been found outside of the Baltimore Aquarium.

o o o o o o o o o o

Dread was a familiar companion. The thick undercurrent pulled slowly and consistently at the seams of Will's reality. Dread was the knowledge that there was dark waters beneath the thin ice. Dread was the feeling of the inch that separated Will from desperation. It was a spatial emotion.

The police had cordoned off the entire aquarium, and through the mess of activity Will strode alongside the water and massive chrome building. For once the sky was clear and the late rising sun set the harbor and aquarium gleaming. Most of the activity was gathered at one side of the aquarium beneath an overpass that connected the aquarium to another pier. Beverly saw him and her eyes went wide, turning with a hand outstretched as if to keep him at bay; and that quickened his pace, searching the dark shape hanging beneath the underpass; and Jack was looking at him as well, all the CSIs were it seemed. A moment of paranoia, bile crawling up his throat.

"Hang on, Will," Beverly said, reaching out to him.

He shouldered her aside and looked up at the body.

Everything went slow. Hyper-awareness, his mind supplied, as he felt every single beat of his heart and every hair on his skin rising. "Jack," Will snapped. "Give me space."

The pendulum was already swinging.

Everyone was gone. It was just Will and the mangled, bloody corpse hanging from thousands of lines of barbed wire, wrapping bloody around naked flesh. The body was hanging upside down by one ankle impaled on a meat hook, and his face was about level with Will's.

A face that looked very similar to his own.

Dark brown curls like his.

Features younger, no bags under his eyes, a different pattern of stubble.

Will watched the body twist and recoil in reverse to the point where he hung from a meat hook that pierced his ankle.

The pendulum swung.

This is my design.

Will blinked, disoriented as he found himself suddenly in the waiting room of Hannibal's office. He turned, vibrating with the force of his spasms, scanning his surroundings in disbelief -- and the door opened and Hannibal was there in his perfect three piece suit, at first affectionate surprise upon seeing Will there, and then worry as he took in Will's appearance.

"Will?" A soft question.

Barbed wire going tight through flesh as the body fell.

Will pushed into the office, legs moving of their own accord, needing to move, taking in panicky breaths because his lungs just wouldn't fill. "I don't know how I got here," he heard himself saying through the static, pacing the familiar room. "I was at a crime scene, and now I'm here, just here like --" He fumbled for his watch, the hands spinning in his vision before he made out the time. "Four hours. Four hours and I don't know what I've been doing, I don't --"

He clutched his head, chest tight.

I impale my own ankle on the meat hook, between the fibularis longus muscle and fibula.

And then Hannibal was holding his arms, grounding him. "Breathe, Will," he commanded.

"I can't," he gasped, shuddering.

I wrap the barbed wire loosely around my body and secure the ends to the suspension points.

"Will, you're here now."

He looked up, fighting to breathe deep. Hannibal's eyes were wide, worried, an urgency to his voice. "You lost time," Hannibal said, rubbing Will's arms.

Will laughed harshly, more like a bark. "I did, I -- there's something wrong with me. This isn't my type of crazy, Hannibal, I've never lost time before."

I remember killing myself but not how I got here.

He pushed against Hannibal's chest, but he was held tightly in place. "Will, look at me."

"I need a brain scan. Something's wrong, I'm sick--"

"Sleepwalking. Disassociation. Your mind is retreating from repeated exposure to trauma."

"I'm not traumatized!" Will shoved harder. Caught a glimpse of Hannibal's shocked expression as he stepped backwards, the echo of his words mocking him.

"You can't keep working these cases," Hannibal said firmly. "It's breaking you."

"I'm the only one who can catch them," Will said, the defense automatic, not quite registering what Hannibal was saying.

"I don't care about the cases," Hannibal said sharply, his voice rising to nearly a shout for the first time in Will's experience. "I don't care about the lives you save; I care about your life."

"You don't know." Will shook his head, rooted to the spot in simultaneous need to back away and fall into his arms. "If it's not physical then it's mental illness." His voice cracked on the word. "I can't -- you don't understand."

I want to be conscious for my short fall. I have subdued myself with a sleeper hold, and I wait until I am awake before dropping from the overpass.

Hannibal stepped forward with a softly outstretched hand, worry apparent on his face; something else there too, that Will couldn't focus on. "Will," he called softly, stepping into his space and bringing his tense body into his arms. Will collapsed against him, shuddering and breathing harshly -- but Hannibal's hand was stroking tenderly through his hair, his body steady to hold Will's unraveling form, and somehow Will found his breath. Hannibal's scent -- cologne and the familiar musk, the warmth of it -- filled his head, banishing some of the panic. And then, oh god, the clench of loss. They were here now, and only now, and Will clutched to him desperately.

"I know a neurologist," Hannibal said quietly, lips brushing Will's ear. "I'll give him a call. We'll figure it out, together."

"I don't know what I've been doing," Will said numbly.

I watch myself bleed out from thousands of wounds, rusted wire soaked in blood. What should I take from myself?

"Where was the crime scene?" Hannibal asked.

"The Baltimore Aquarium." Will shut his eyes tight. He was both numb and aching all over like his body was confused, forcing a pain out of his mind. His legs were weak and he felt faint. "Four hours."

Hannibal leaned back to look Will over, placing a hand on his damp forehead. "Lay down," he instructed, guiding Will to the divan and helping him take off his coat. "You're warm. I'll get you some water."

Will went pliantly against the leather couch, rubbing his eyes. Did a fever mean he really was sick? From the window he heard Hannibal say, "You drove here. I've received no call from Alana or Jack, so it's likely you were functional."

"I remember looking at the body." He swallowed. "I started to... relive it, and then I was here. I'm still..."

I take everything. I fill my abdominal cavity with barbed wire and fishing line and sew myself back up.

Hannibal returned with a glass of water, kneeling at Will's side. "Stay with me, Will," he said. "Don't go back there yet."

"Hannibal." His name choking in his throat.

"Will." A reflection. A promise that they were both here, witnessing each other.

"It was me," Will said through gritted teeth. "It looked just like me. A surrogate. I'm --" He sobbed once.

I did this to myself.

Hannibal caressed his face. "Drink," he commanded softly, and Will obeyed.

He was unraveling. He had been for some time, and now the spool was falling, tugging seams loose, nothing to fill the gaps but numbness. Will sipped the water and nearly choked on it, but Hannibal was there with a hand on his back, guiding him. Hannibal took the glass away and set it on the ground. He took Will's face with both hands and guided their eyes to meet. "You are here now with me," he said. "Unharmed and safe, and for that I am grateful. I will not let you go, Will."

"Clutching water in your hands," Will murmured, feeling the soft stroke of fingers against his cheekbone.

"I will not let you fall." Hannibal pressed their foreheads together. "Trust me, in this alone -- that if you break I will find every shard and reassemble you, stronger than before. Be here with me, know that I hold you."

ooooooooooo

While Hannibal met his remaining patients for the day, Will sat in the waiting room with a book in hand, trying to distract himself from the knowledge eating away at him. It was one of the books Abigail had borrowed on Mesoamerican cultures. Will was reading it without truly processing.

> *In the dark ephemeral reflection of his obsidian mirror and the transient sound of his ceramic flower pipes lies the sensuous nature of a god who meditates materially and invisibly with omniscience and omnipresence.*

Despite Hannibal's urging to stay present and to not return to the source of his lost time, Will could not avoid the knowledge he possessed of the crime scene. He did not remember stepping into the mind of the killer or processing the crime scene so much as he remembered committing the crime -- the information was there, how it got there was not.

But Will had not killed his surrogate. He had not killed himself.

He could not allow himself to entertain that possibility.

Will was not a killer.

But he could not extract himself from this one.

> *'Night Wind' or the Lord of the Smoking Mirror was closely associated with the idea of destruction including the cyclical destruction of the cosmic eras and also of the earthly kingdoms and fortunes that he allowed to men but took away from those who lacked respect.*

Will needed to know what he had told Jack after he looked at the crime scene. Right now, Will didn't know the killer's motivations, because he could only see his own motivations. *In the safety of your fantasies, Will-as-killer and Will-as-victim dance to create a careful balance.* He killed himself to prevent himself from harming anyone else. He wrapped himself in barbed wire because that's what he had been obsessing about for months.

But he could only do that in his mind.

Hence the surrogate.

> *The black mirror is not good to look into; it does not make one appear good. When someone uses such a mirror, from it is to be seen a distorted mouth, swollen eyelids, thick lips. Perhaps the obsidian mirror reveals the inner self; it is open to debate whether the alternative image one views in the obsidian mirror is more or less valid than our ordinary perceptions of reality.*

No. The Copycat Killer had used another surrogate, just like he did with Freddie Lounds. For some reason, the Copycat wanted Will alive for now, so he found a replacement, to show Will his intentions. A gift.

See?

They had all been for him. Cassie Boyle, Malissa Scurr, the Freddie-Surrogate. He was being stalked.

"I want you to install a home security system," Will said when Hannibal had finished with his patients. "Do you have a gun?"

Hannibal looked solemn. "No. I haven't a license either."

Will glanced away, eyes rimmed with red, the set of his jaw firm. "I think the Copycat Killer is stalking me."

If he sounded paranoid, Hannibal didn't say. "Whatever will make you feel safer."

Will looked down at where Hannibal's hand rested on his elbow. "The victim from this morning looked so much like me," he said. "A mirror image. He wants to kill me. He reads Tattle Crime, he knows that we're together. I won't come to your house if I think it'll put you in danger."

"I would feel safer having my mongoose around."

"Maybe you're wrong. Maybe I attract the vipers."

Will let Hannibal bring him close. "Regardless, I would have you close."

"Why?" He rested his head against Hannibal's shoulder, the question that was never truly answered pouring out of him. "Why? Why risk me?"

"You know why."

"You don't want to tell me." There was a lump in his throat. He didn't want Hannibal to say it, didn't want it to manifest, because if he lost this —

"William," Hannibal breathed. "My sweet William."

o o o o o o o o o o

The carnation remained on the bedside table, frilled petals curled up on themselves as the moisture was bled out, dying and crumbling.

Will looked to Hannibal — his high, aristocratic features edged with concern, the immaculate suit clinging to his body like a glove, the solidity of his presence. “Please,” was all Will could say, and he prayed Hannibal knew what he needed, that he would take absolute control of Will’s world.

Hannibal regarded Will for a moment, dissecting the latent needs buried in that word, and then he sat down on the duvet. “Undress,” he said, eyes flashing with hunger.

The sharp tone of the command relaxed something in Will. His head bobbed for a moment, as exhausted as he was, and then he stood in front of Hannibal and began to unbutton his shirt. He folded it carelessly and placed it on the ground instead of dropping it in a pile on the floor. His trousers followed, his undershirt, socks, and boxers.

“Put them away,” Hannibal said quietly.

Will did so, putting the clothes in the hamper in the walk-in-closet. His limbs felt soft, his feet moving without conscious decision to bring him back to his… to Hannibal.

“The medical bag.”

Will fetched the bag, heavy in his hands. Hannibal’s face was tilted up to him, holding Will here if only with his gaze. He gestured to the ground before him. Will lowered the bag, and sank to his knees. He sighed, a low chord of arousal sounding in him as he took took this familiar position. Hannibal’s legs were spread wide, and Will wanted to touch him but didn’t, fists clenching briefly by his side.

“The bit,” Hannibal said, barely a whisper. His eyes were heavy lidded.

Will felt the moan growing unsounded in his chest. He opened the antique medical bag and found the black rubber bit inside. When he handed it over to Hannibal, their fingers brushed, sending a spark down his spine. Hannibal leaned forward — god the smell of him — and Will opened his mouth. A thumb rubbed against his lower lip, and then Hannibal placed the bit between his teeth, and secured it around the back. Will couldn’t help but moan then as he felt the familiar pressure to his jaw.

Take it all away.

Will’s lip was pulled down, and then Hannibal’s face was close, and he ran his tongue along Will’s bared teeth, upper and then lower, feeling the shape of his mouth around the bit. Will shuddered, forcing his hands to stay against his legs. “So good,” Hannibal breathed, taking Will’s upper lip between his teeth. “Undress me.”

Will shut his eyes. The world was spinning, unravelling around him — but he didn’t need to understand, didn’t need to think or decide. He sat on his knees and undid Hannibal’s tie, the button of his waistcoat, and then those of his shirt. Each article of clothing was folded and placed neatly on the duvet, before Will would return them to the closet. Hannibal's chest was bared to the soft light, all thickly corded muscles around broad shoulders and ribs, and silver spun hair. Will slowly worked open his suit pants, feeling the swell of his election under the heel of his hand.

He sank into himself, into the feeling. Hannibal lifted his hips and Will slid down his pants, starting to shake and shudder agains the arousal clawing through him. Still, they didn't touch besides Will removing his clothes — garter, socks, silken briefs, all folded in shaking hands.

"Put them away." Hannibal's voice was a low growl.

Will didn't know if he could stand to his feet but he obeyed, taking the clothes to the closet and putting everything in it's rightful place, holding on because he had a task to perform, had to do what Hannibal said. Suit hung up. Socks in the hamper. Garter and cufflinks in their designated drawers, tie hanging. His head swam as he returned to Hannibal, both of them half hard and naked, anticipation welling between them like blood from a deep wound.

Will knelt.

Hannibal grabbed his hair, pulling until it just stung.

Will's mouth gaped against the bit, tongue pressing out from under plastic. Hannibal snared his lower lip in his mouth, sucking hard, sending a jolt of pleasure through Will's body. He was itching to touch Hannibal, god, it was so hard to keep his hands to himself, but he didn't want to shatter this fragile reality, that the two of them were here, alive, together in this moment if not another. Will whimpered as his lips were kissed, sucked, bruised. His nails bit into the meat of his thighs.

"The rope," Hannibal whispered against his mouth.

Will found the coils and placed them in Hannibal's hands. Like kneeling before an altar. Like ceremony, the wrapping of rope around his flesh, holding his body in place. Would Hannibal make him like Christ, or the mourners at his feet, body bent into allegorical shapes? The ropes were a tightness around his skin that both cut and contained him. Hannibal tied his arms behind his back, the ropes twining around his shoulders and chest and waist in a harness. Where the rope squeezed him his skin rose on either side, and he thought of cuts, of barbed wire tearing him to ribbons.

Hannibal moved Will around, not roughly, but manipulating him into the shape Hannibal needed, making Will rotate on the floor so Hannibal could remain comfortably seated. Will's thighs were tied to his calves, and his wrists to his ankles, until he couldn't move at all.

This way, I can't hurt you.

Will gnawed at the bit, finding a resonant fierceness in Hannibal's eyes. Hannibal kissed his pried open mouth, soft now, moaning loudly in a way that made Will's toes curl.

Hannibal shoved Will back and he fell against the floor. Hannibal nudged him over onto his stomach, and then his foot was pressing in between Will's shoulder blades, pinning him into the carpet. Will gasped, choking slightly on the bit. "Speak," Hannibal said.

Will pushed the bit from his mouth to rest on his chin. "What do you want me to say?" he asked breathlessly.

"It's not what I want, Will." His foot pressed harder. Will's back arched, his chest and thighs pressed against the floor, feet and hands in the air.

"I don't want to speak," he said into the carpet. "I don't want words."

“Tell me what you feel right now.”

Will groaned. “I feel… that my skin is a poor container. That I am already dispersing.” He bit the inside of his mouth, tears pricking to his eyes.

“What else?” Hannibal’s foot was on the back of his head. He was pinned, helpless, powerless.

“Please,” Will pleaded. “I don’t want to talk about this.”

Hannibal put weight on his foot, and Will’s face dug into the carpet. “I won’t ask again.” He removed his foot.

Will breathed, hard. “I don’t think you can hold me together,” he said, heart racing. “In some ways I feel like I’m already gone, and you’re… you assemble an image of myself you can hold onto. We both are. God, fuck — I sometimes wish we had never done this so I wouldn’t feel—“ His whole body clenched up.

Hannibal knelt beside him, and yanked his head up by the hair. Will’s scalp screamed. “So you wouldn’t feel what?”

“Expectation breeds disappointment,” Will said, dripping venom. “Wanting, desiring, is unsafe.”

Hannibal took hold of the rope and dragged Will around the corner of the bed. The carpet burned into his skin and he grunted in pain. He was left face first into the carpet while Hannibal moved around him. “After all this time,” Hannibal said with a note of displeasure, “You’ve come back to this. Fear of rejection and loss despite the fact that we are both here, willing and wanting.”

Will felt a new rope loop under the cords on his upper back, and then he was being hauled up until the only point of contact with the floor was his knees. He panted heavily, feeling the pleasurable ache of rope digging into his flesh as his weight pulled him towards the ground.

“That’s the… irony of this,” Will panted. “Tying me up, holding me down, ordering me. I can’t control myself, but if I can’t control myself then neither can you.”

“Look at me.”

Will opened his eyes, looking up the length of Hannibal to his eyes. The tendrils of his empathy snaked out, probing the abyssal depths of his amber eyes, looking for the few places where light caught and illuminated. “You feel it too,” Will whispered. “This isn’t just my petty insecurities. You know that we are on borrowed time.”

“I have never behaved as if our relationship were terminal,” Hannibal replied, a nimble evasion of the question and the truth.

“Yet,” Will snapped.

“Our time together is precious. Time and the mutable nature of our arrangement cannot be contained. You are not the same man who first crawled onto my dining room table, as I am not the same man who tied you there.”

“I don’t know what kind of man I am.”

Hannibal held his jaw, stroking with his thumb. “Regardless of whether a physical malady is found, do you think I would let you go?”

Will leaned into the touch, the words sounding bittersweet. “You might not have a choice.”

Hannibal’s fingertips traced his face, then fell away. “Our moments together are not evanescent. They are carved into the stone of our flesh. The body remembers, even if the mind does not.”

Will’s cock throbbed. “Muscle memory.” The words barely said, just formed with lip and tongue and teeth. His chest was tight. He lowered his eyes, head hanging from stretched shoulders. “I don’t want to lose you. Almost as much as I don’t want to lose myself.”

Hannibal crouched before him, running a hand through his hair and lifting his face. He looked sad. “Sometimes we must get lost in the woods in order to find ourselves,” he said quietly. “When the way is dark and forbidding, the path we make for ourselves may be treacherous. Know that when the beasts of your fear rear their heads, you are close to the truth.”

“What’s the truth?” Will asked. “What do you see?”

Hannibal sighed, features softening with fondness and longing, and Will wondered what of his feelings had been his own, and what were Hannibal’s, seeping through unnoticed all this time. If there was a difference, anymore, or if their gaze had collapsed and all that bounced between them just *was*. No reflections, no mirrors, just the two of them like solid smoke.

“I see you and I,” Hannibal answered, “and we are perfect.”

Chapter End Notes

p.s. Will should probably have paid more attention to what he was reading in that book. part of Tezcatlipoca's appearance is his left foot being replaced by a smoking mirror.

[illustration]

Chapter Summary

official *A Mirror in the Dark* art

art by yours truly. you can find my art blog on tumblr @quinnhpm and you can find my sinful fan / nsfw blog @wormsin . come say hi!

I also wanted to take the chance to thank all of my readers! even if you've never left a kudo or comment, thank you for joining me in this sexy 130k word nightmare. are you having fun? does it ache very terribly? I hope so. this is basically the first time I've written fic since I was in middle school, and I finally went, fuck it, I'm indulging in all of my favorite sins. this indulgence has brought me a lot of enjoyment -- so much so that I might start making erotic/horror novels and comics? for so long I was worried about writing and art'ing the right way (literary, artistic, """relevant""") but honestly, fuck that, get in the car, we're going to bone down in a crime scene of our own making.

thanks. enjoy your sins, whatever they are.

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Broken

Chapter Summary

“But why is the Copycat interested in you?”

That was a good question.

There were good questions, taunting Will with their emptiness; bubbles in the water where there should be fish, but his line came up empty. There weren't just lines in the dark but the spaces in between, wire becoming cracks in black glass -- some of that black gleamed, showing Will a distorted image, and other pieces of obsidian fell away and the black showed nothing. There were places in Will's mind where the absence of memory and time and understanding left a bloody slick on the surface, like he had just missed a killer dragging a body out of sight.

His body.

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Will gets a brain scan.

All the pieces were in place.

In the early hours of the morning Hannibal sat at the desk in his study, drawing on the large pad of paper. This particular drawing was testing his artistic capabilities, the subject and rough arrangement taken from a drawing in a Spanish codex about Aztec human sacrifice, but reimagined as a Renaissance composition — idealized bodies in motion dressed in elaborate ritual costumes. The Aztec style of art was worlds different from what Hannibal had studied and drawn before. He only knew realism, and found it difficult to interpret the original Aztec drawings of Tezcatlipoca, who hovered in the shadows behind his sacrifice.

The sacrifice had Will’s face and body, twisted over the pyramid altar in ecstasy even as the knife was plunged into his belly. The scene was a celebration in addition to a sacrifice. The chosen yearly sacrifice to Tezcatlipoca would live for a year as a king, and on the last days of his life, would feast and revel before the priests took him up the temple to break upon the stone for their god.

All of the pieces were set just how Hannibal wished them to be. Will was primed with encephalitis and violent fantasies, coaxed to blossoming by Hannibal over the past months. Abigail had confided her dark secret to him and, when Hannibal had her to himself, she could be molded as well. The Marionette was close to capture and her final show.

Doubt was an unfamiliar emotion.

When Hannibal had scented the encephalitis on Will, heavy with such sweet possibilities, two plans had come together in his mind: Will’s confession of self-victimization and erotic fixation on

violence pairing beautifully with the inflammatory source of psychosis. Hannibal fed the fire and dampened it, strengthened associations, and in truth Will needed so little nudging to get to this point — he was he own creature, in the end. But now, Hannibal was tired of Will operating at half-capacity. He was impatient to see that radiant mind clear of the fever. It wasn't that he regretted Will's suffering; on the contrary it was exquisite. Rather, he wanted to free Will from the crippling shackles of illness and see him come into his full power.

Now was an opportunity to unveil the encephalitis and change his plans.

He wouldn't, of course.

It was far too late for that. Will would need the encephalitis to save him from prison. Will still needed Hannibal's guiding hand, and Hannibal was so looking forward to seeing what his sweet William would show him when the moment came.

In the drawing, the sacrifice's left leg was draped gracefully off the altar, and by the foot Hannibal rendered a broken circular mirror, arabesque lines of graphite rising from it as smoke. Will wasn't just a sacrifice, after all.

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Will saw himself in his mind's eye as a small point on a distant horizon. When he moved further away from that point, it became larger, and when he tried to approach it, it became smaller. Will was a camera performing a Hitchcock zoom, perspective distorted, disassociation warping his sense of space. Coming to himself was the same as pulling away.

Whenever Will closed his eyes, he saw the nightmare playing in his mind.

In a dark briar woods, the stag prowled, its antlers crowned with a nest of wire, mouth dropping with viscera. Branches became antlers, and everywhere Will turned, bodies were impaled and hanging in razor webs. It would be easier if he didn't know their names and faces from the cold case files.

He focused on Jack's hands and how they punctuated his statements, not a display of strength trying to convince everyone of his authority, but simply force. "You think the Copycat is the Chesapeake Ripper," Jack was saying. "And you think that he's stalking you."

The accusation of paranoia was clear as day. "Taking a particular interest," Will clarified to Jack's hands. "There is no doubt of that. He killed my doppelgänger."

"This isn't the Ripper's MO," Jack argued.

"The Copycat is taking surgical trophies and theatrically displaying his victims in public," Hannibal said.

"It's not the Ripper's *motivation*, as I understand it," Jack clarified. Meaning the way Will understood his motivations. "The Ripper has never used surrogates or taken particular interest in people. He's not supposed to see them as people. And, he doesn't imitate other killers."

“The Ripper sees his victims as swine,” Will agreed. “Maybe he doesn’t see all people that way, or all people as… the same swine.”

“I have a hard time believing that the Ripper would take a replacement if he really wanted to kill you or Freddie Lounds,” Jack said.

“Maybe it’s a protege of the Ripper,” Hannibal suggested. “The Copycat is a copycat of killers, and could have learned elements of his MO from the Ripper. Once the Copycat was confident enough in his study, he imitated Garret Jacob Hobbs — but with the Ripper as inspiration.”

“He was… attracted to something in Hobbs,” Will mused.

“Cannibalism is a rare and fascinating pathology,” Hannibal said.

“The Ripper works alone,” Jack said. “So we’re thinking the Copycat studied him from afar, yes?”

“We have no idea what the Ripper does between his sounders,” Hannibal replied. “But yes, it seems unlikely that he would risk exposure by mentoring another killer.”

“The Copycat has the Ripper as his ideal,” Will said, distaste dripping from his mouth. “The others were… below him. Hobbs regarded his victims as too human. Budge’s vision was too small, his serenade rejected because the Copycat already had his ideal partner. The Marionette…” Will chewed his lip. “He respects her. He can’t do what she does, not yet.”

“Another source of inspiration,” Hannibal added with a nod. “The Copycat took aesthetic elements from the Marionette in the same way he does the Ripper.”

Jack drummed his fingers on his desk. "You're making connections, Will, and I can't follow all of them. First you tell me that the woman at the symphony was killed by the person Budge serenaded. You tell me that's the same killer who copied Hobbs. Then you tell me that could be the Ripper."

"Copying and embellishing other killers is this killer's M.O.," Hannibal said. "Any active killers in the area could become inspiration. The fact that he uses surrogates for some of his victims indicates an obsession with imitation."

“Alright, that’s fine.” Jack pointed at Will sharply. “But why is the Copycat interested in you?”

That was a good question.

There were good questions, taunting Will with their emptiness; bubbles in the water where there should be fish, but his line came up empty. There weren't just lines in the dark but the spaces in between, wire becoming cracks in black glass -- some of that black gleamed, showing Will a distorted image, and other pieces of obsidian fell away and the black showed nothing. There were places in Will's mind where the absence of memory and time and understanding left a bloody slick on the surface, like he had just missed a killer dragging a body out of sight.

His body.

Or one that looked just like his, laying on the slab of the FBI morgue, just as real as any hallucination. Hannibal had gently suggested that Will not look at the corpse, and Will had sniped under his breath, "Is that an order, master?"

Only sometimes, sometimes, it wasn't his body, or the body of past victims, and Will would not think about that.

Price had cut open Will's surrogate and sure enough, like he knew there would be (how did he know there would be?) there was a nest of fishing line and razor wire and hooks in the abdominal cavity.

Will's foot itched.

Will's head felt like it was splitting open with the force of his headache, hair clinging to the sweat on his brow. The handful of aspirin hadn't done shit, and now he felt the sound of the MRI as a physical blow, whirring and thumping in every bone, both tactile and visual. He couldn't keep the intrusive thoughts at bay, each thump the slice of wire through flesh, the massive beating heart of the feathered stag.

He was trapped, a briar of antlers closing in, tips hovering inches from his skin. He was hanging by his ankle, caught in a nest of barbed wire, shrikes pecking out his organs. He was building his web with tender, steady hands. The golden blade of a pendulum, the red flash of a setting sun on water, the cast of light across a metal web.

When Will was helped out of the MRI, Hannibal's face said everything in how it closed off all emotion.

They didn't find everything.

"We didn't find anything abnormal. No vascular malformations, no tumors. No swelling or bleeding. No evidence of stroke. Nothing wrong with you neurologically." Doctor Sutcliffe said when they were seated in his office. Will didn't like him. He didn't like most doctors, to be fair. All of the headstrong confidence of EMTs without the pragmatism.

"Usually when I tell a patient that, they're happy to hear it," Dr. Sutcliffe said in the wake of Will's silence.

"So what I'm experiencing is psychological," Will said. It wasn't a question. *They didn't find anything.*

"Brain scans can't diagnose a mental disorder. They can only rule out medical illnesses, like a tumor, that can cause similar symptoms."

Will stared at the wall, away from Hannibal.

"We'll do some more tests. Take some blood samples," the doctor was saying. "But I imagine they'll be just as inconclusive."

God, he hated doctors. Almost as much as psychiatrists. Funny that he ended up with one. *They didn't find anything.*

Will didn't look at Hannibal. Not in Sutcliffe's office, not when they were leaving the hospital, not when they were driving back to his house. Will had entertained the notion of breaking up with Hannibal if they didn't find anything wrong with his brain. He wondered if he had the strength to do it.

"I'm trying to decide whether or not to tell Alana," Will said numbly when they were parked in Hannibal's drive, replacing one decision he had to make with another.

Hannibal hesitated before speaking. "She is your psychiatrist now."

"Institutionalization always felt like the final line I would never survive crossing," Will said quietly. "Whenever I walk through those doors, at the BSHCI, or the Port Haven facility, I always see them slamming shut behind me, interring me in the belly of the beast."

"The cage feels inevitable."

"It didn't," Will clarified. "When I imagined it, it always was a mistake, but one my psyche wouldn't survive. You know, when I hit my mid twenties I was so relieved to pass the threshold when schizophrenia typically presents."

"There is no diagnosis for what you are."

"Maybe there will be." Will leaned his head back, closing his eyes. "A new one for the books."

Hannibal rested his hand on Will's thigh. "I will not leave you in an institution to rot."

"If," Will breathed. "If. You should bring a game of go when you visit me. I'd like to learn by playing you."

Hannibal squeezed his thigh. "It's your decision whether to tell Alana or not. But I will insist that you not consult on any cases for Jack. I will speak to Alana about that, if you wish."

Will placed his hand on Hannibal's, squeezed it, and the removed it.

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Jack came to Hannibal's office and Hannibal poured them brandy while snow softly fell outside.

"How is Will?" Jack asked.

Hannibal made himself comfortable. Jack had come to him like so many other nights for perspective and assurances, but tonight, Hannibal had no reassurances to give. When he spoke it wasn't with a tone of accusation. To paint Jack's guilt would be disingenuous, even if, as Will's lover, Hannibal had reason for ire.

"You knew," Hannibal said measuredly, "from the moment you walked into his classroom, that you were putting Will in a potentially destructive environment."

Jack barely inclined his head, a small acknowledgment even as he offered his defense. "I had eight college girls dead in Minnesota. He caught the killer."

Hannibal examined the gleam of firelight in the glass of brandy, how the flames licked deep amber. "He also caught their killer's disease. He can't stop thinking about what it is to take a life."

Jack sipped his brandy. "I'd rather Will Graham go a little mad than some innocent lose their life. And I think Will Graham would rather that, too."

Presumptuous. Accurate to a point. Hannibal schooled the smirk from his face. The Will in the reality Hannibal was crafting was hardly innocent. "What of Will's life?"

"I know Will is going to survive," Jack said. "He'll always come back to being Will."

"A version of Will."

"I suppose you think you know him better. Is there something you all aren't telling me? Do you think he's not going to survive?"

Drawing his gaze from the fire in the glass, Hannibal leveled Jack with a cold stare, though his voice was still mild. "He will survive. But not if he continues to consult for you."

"That's for Alana to determine now."

Hannibal shook his head, faintly smiling. "Yet you came to me, and not Alana."

"I think Alana thinks Will is weaker than he is," Jack said. "Neither of you saw him at this crime scene. I didn't get to this position by not being able to read people, Hannibal. I know Will is suffering. But I also know that he can take it."

For a while, Hannibal said nothing. The brandy warmed his tongue, spreading through him slowly, and his lips parted as if hesitating to release the words. "He saw a neurologist today," he finally said, quietly, almost mournfully. "They found nothing wrong with him. He was very upset by that."

Jack frowned. "He wanted something to be wrong?"

Hannibal glanced at Jack and then away, giving a display of regret and worry. "We wanted an answer that wasn't mental illness."

Jack looked stung, shaking his head slightly as he took a long drink, emptying his glass. Hannibal gestured to the bottle, and Jack rose to refill his drink. He remained by the desk. "Do you think Will is mentally ill?"

"The problem Will has is too many mirror neurons," Hannibal explained, not quite answering the question. "Our heads are filled with them when we're children. Supposed to help us socialize and then melt away. But Will held onto his, which makes knowing who he is a challenge. He's always reflecting those around him."

"It's a mild form of echopraxia," Jack acknowledged.

"When you take him to a crime scene, Jack, the very air has screams smeared on it. In those places, he doesn't just reflect, he absorbs. You use Will as your mirror, but he is no perfect reflective surface. The act of seeing has changed him."

"Do you not like how he's changed?" Jack said, a calmly worded accusation.

Hannibal looked at him sharply, and for a moment they both nearly glared at each other. Jack had never been rude to Hannibal before, always an enjoyable companion, but this was extremely distasteful. Of the three of them, Jack, Alana, and Hannibal, Jack was the one with the most impersonal relationship with Will, and ultimately the one with power over his work. Even before Jack knew about his relationship with Will, Hannibal knew that Jack took his word as recommendation only, to be considered if it matched what Jack wanted. For all the companionship they shared over Hannibal's food, Jack used Hannibal.

It would be better to weaken Jack's resolve.

"It's a terrible thing to see those we love suffer," Hannibal said with a meek look away, knowing Jack heard the thrust of manipulation behind that statement. Let it bite.

Jack swallowed, and sighed deeply. "It's Will and Alana's decision, now."

"Alana and I both believe Will is traumatized by his work." *By what you have put him through*, remained unsaid but clear.

"He can survive it," Jack said quietly into his glass of bourbon.

"Sometimes we must become the monsters to survive them."

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For a long time Will just stared at his hands, not able to form the words. He remembered that session with Hannibal where he had stared at his hands and saw them bloody, wrists chaffed. The session that he first really opened up to him, that had spiraled into all of this -- or perhaps unraveled, itching a scratch and dislodging the first thread.

Alana waited, but Will could feel her worry like a winch tightening between them.

"I suppose this is the point of therapy," Will said sarcastically, "To help one explore difficult decisions. Only one of my decisions is whether to tell you something or not. You can't exactly help me with that."

"Can we stick with that for a moment?" Alana asked. "The feeling of being unable to tell me. Are you afraid of my reaction? Nervous about the impact it will have on our relationship?"

Will smirked maliciously. "Oh, that's easy Doctor Bloom. I'm afraid of institutionalization. Have been, for so long."

"Do you want to know the circumstances under which I would recommend institutionalization?" Alana asked, sounding very professional.

Will shrugged.

She leaned forward, bending her head to catch Will's eyes from where they hid under his frames, though he didn't look at her, and then she sounded far less professional. "I would if I had no other choice," Alana said decisively.

Will glanced at her mouth. The mouth that had kissed him. It was far easier to pretend that they both didn't care about each other, but that didn't make it true.

"I don't believe you are a danger to others, or yourself," Alana went on. "I can imagine what an institution would do to you. That is a last possible resort."

"We talk about it all the time," Will said. "Jack, you, Hannibal and I. Well, we don't talk about it outright, but it's there under he surface. How everyone is waiting for the case that breaks me. The moment when I look so close I become the thing I see. Aren't we all waiting for that?"

"I'm not waiting for you to hit rock bottom," she said with a sad smile. "I want to support you now."

Will swallowed. He stared at one of the abstract art pieces on the wall, realizing that he'd become familiar with the sight of it. "The thing is," he said slowly, "Its already happened. I killed Hobbs and he never got out of my head. I --"

The words caught in his throat again. Some things once said could never be taken back. Maybe he could keep on pretending for just a little longer, until -- until what? *They didn't find anything.*

"I got a brain scan yesterday," Will said quickly. "They didn't find anything wrong. I'm going again today, just in case. More tests. I lost four hours of time on Monday. The footage is all missing. I've been sleepwalking for two months, and hallucinating -- visual, auditory... tactile." He grimaced. "It feels like there are blades all around me, waiting to cut. And then... they cut."

"Oh, Will." Alana's eyes were damp, sympathy in her voice. "I'm so sorry. That sounds incredibly uncomfortable."

Will crossed his arms over his chest, the pressure chasing some of the phantom sensations away. "I've spent so much of my life telling myself 'I'm not crazy', and for the most part, I've been right." His words were choking on the way out, barely forming in his mouth. "Now it reeks of denial."

Alana took a deep breath. "Are there other symptoms?" she asked.

Will laughed. "Let's see: chronic headaches, insomnia, stress-induced-fevers. Oh, and disassociation, a lot of it. You know all of that though."

"Stress induced fevers?" Alana asked.

"That's what Hannibal calls them. I wasn't convinced it was just stress, but they didn't find anything in my brain."

"Any suicidal ideation?"

Will jerked. "No, no. Not at all. I mean... I think about dying, but it's like thinking about killing. I wouldn't ever -- I don't want to."

They were quiet for a moment. "Good," Alana said, almost absentmindedly. She blinked away a few unshed tears. "Your symptoms could all be attributed to PTSD."

"Hallucinations?" Will shook his head. "These aren't flashbacks."

"You have an incredibly active imagination," Alana argued. "And there's new studies. It's not unheard of."

"I know what's my imagination and what's not. There are things I can't help but see. Even so, losing time isn't a symptom of PTSD."

"Repressed or suppressed memory can be a result of trauma."

"Oh god," Will groaned. He put his hands over his eyes and tilted his head back. "Do you really think I've lasted this long in my career by being acutely traumatized by crime scenes?"

She ignored the disdain in his voice. "Everyone reacts differently to trauma," she said evenly. "Big or small. We don't always react to the same trauma the same way either."

"Hannibal's been pushing trauma too," Will said, running his hand down his jaw. Quietly, almost to himself. "Because trauma can be cured, I suppose."

"Cured is a crude word," Alana said with a small smile. "Traumas always live with us, but we can learn to live with them in turn."

Will was quiet. And then, weakly, he voiced the other difficult decision. "I'm thinking of breaking up with Hannibal."

The silence wasn't uncomfortable. Alana was processing and acknowledging the difficulty of his words. His feet ached suddenly, and he shut down on that pain. "Do you think you're a danger to Hannibal?" Alana asked quietly.

Will smiled. It wouldn't leave his face, a bitter grimace, lips twitching in the struggle of his aching heart. "I don't need to cut him to hurt him," he said.

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"Have I broken you?"

Will stood in Jack's office, jacked draped over his arm. He wasn't going to sit. His decision was final -- he couldn't continue to work these cases. Will smiled briefly, and adjusted his glasses, not answering Jack's question.

Jack sighed and spread his hands across his desk, which was littered with the Copycat case files. He considered the files, fingering the edge of a photograph. "After Miriam Lass died," Jack said, like a confession, "I went to pack up my office. Then the idea of packing became so overwhelming I thought I should just leave. I got a trainee killed. It was a failure of leadership. I was responsible."

"You didn't kill Miriam Lass," Will said. "The Chesapeake Ripper did."

"Doesn't feel that way to me." Jack slid the files around so that the photograph from the last crime scene was covered, and then looked up. "I pulled her out of a classroom like I pulled you out of a classroom."

"I'm not dead, Jack."

"But you won't work these cases anymore."

Will huffed an aborted laugh. So long as he was alive he was supposed to make work of his gift, then. "This is me taking responsibility."

"You thought about quitting before, but you didn't," Jack pointed out. "I knew it was because you're a stubborn bastard but I also thought it was because this work provided you with some stability. Catching killers, closing cases. I thought a part of you needed that."

"Stability requires a foundation, Jack," Will replied. "My foundation is made of sand."

"I'm not sand," Jack said, voice rising, "I'm bedrock."

"Not mine," Will said. "Not anymore. I'm sorry Jack. I need to heal. If I get better --"

"When," Jack cut in, pointing a thick finger at Will. "*When* you get better."

"I'll be seeing you, Jack," Will said, and left.

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Will's feet hurt. Actually, they had been hurting for a while, but it was like his headaches -- he was so used to the pain that he pushed it from his mind until it could not be ignored. Why did his feet hurt? Had he been sleepwalking in the fields again --

No. Will was coming home to Wolf Trap. He glanced at his watch. "It's 5:41 PM. I'm in Wolf Trap Virginia. My name is Will Graham."

He sat down on his porch steps, holding his head in his hands. He has left Jack's office, and then driven here -- but he was supposed to go to Dr. Sutcliffe. Disoriented, Will looked through his text history with Hannibal, and sure enough the evidence was there. Thank god he checked in with Hannibal so frequently. He had asked Dr. Sutcliffe to move his appointment to that night so he could catch a few hours of rest. Hannibal had offered to drive him home, or to the appointment, and Will had declined, saying he would drive over to Hannibal's after he got his second brain scan.

He didn't remember the text conversation at all.

His head was throbbing and something was wrong -- a phantom in the corner of his vision that flicked out of sight whenever he tried to see. He felt nauseous and, fuck, his feet and lower legs were aching --

The snort of the stag's breath on the back of his neck.

The chorus of vibrating metal cords as a body fell into the web.

Hooves pawing at muddy earth.

Will untied his laces but his hands were shaking so damn much and his palms were sweaty so the damn laces kept slipping through his fingers; and as he kicked off his boot he gasped in pain, his vision briefly going white.

His socks were soaked through on the bottom with his own blood. A short coil of barbed wire was wrapped around each of his feet over the socks.

Shaking and nauseous with the sudden realization of pain he'd been feeling all day, but had somehow ignored, Will peeled off the barbed wire. Heard it disengage from flesh with fresh spurts of blood. Held the bloody metal in his hands. It felt so fucking familiar.

He didn't remember the moment when he wrapped his feet in barbed wire, but he remembered telling his mind to ignore the pain, being so out of it that he could delude himself and limp through the day. He wanted to be sick. Instead, he limped to his bathroom and filled the tub with mild water, soaking his feet.

Delusions. *Delusions*. This wasn't just trauma. He wasn't in control of himself, and the water was muddy with blood, and the bodies in the forest were mostly his, and the last pig hadn't been mutilated, and his name was Will Graham --

And it was 8:41 PM and he was in Baltimore, MA at the hospital.

Doctor Sutcliffe reminded Will to remove his watch before getting into the MRI. He got on the tray. Put in ear plugs, but when he entered the tunnel and it started the sound was still overwhelming. Will closed his eyes.

Maybe this was what going insane was like: the world hurtling around you as you tried to find footing, and you just never got the change to get on your feet; like being in a conversation about yourself and not being able to get a word in to correct anyone. He didn't have the opportunity to catch his breath and figure out if he had lost time or just was so out of it he couldn't pay attention to his surroundings.

He wished Hannibal was here.

He was the one who told him not to come.

And Hannibal had listened.

And then, more suddenly than it started, the sound stopped. Will was laying on the MRI tray, but it was now outside of the tunnel. He sat up and removed the earplugs -- silence.

Glancing at the control room, Will saw that it was empty. He was alone. And he had lost time again.

Dread creeped up his spine.

He found his clothes in the changing room and stepped out into the eerie emptiness of the hallway. It was late, but where was everyone? How long had he been laying on the tray, and why had Dr. Sutcliffe left him there? Belatedly, he checked his watch: he had been in the MRI for over an hour. Where was the doctor?

There, on the floor just outside of the doctor's office, by the ajar door, was a dark fleck on the tile. Will slowed. His brain was catching up with his body, and he saw the smear of blood on the doorknob.

"Doctor Sutcliffe?"

When Will heard nothing he shuffled closer to the door, a part of him knowing what he would find on the other side.

He pushed the door open.

The smell of blood hit him, fresh and coppery and familiar.

Dr. Sutcliffe was tied to his desk in thick metal cables. There was a heavy winch bolted into the floor, connected in a taut line to the corpse. The cables cut through his abdomen nearly to the polished, blood soaked wood below, his viscera bubbling up.

Then the police and the FBI were there.

Beverly leaned over Will in the hall, shining the ultra-violet wand up and down his body. Will's hands were clasped in his lap. He didn't shake.

"You're clean," she said quietly, glancing at Jack who hovered nearby. "You probably couldn't have done this without getting something on you. There's nothing on you."

"I don't feel clean," Will said blankly.

"This is the same cable that the Marionette uses," Price said. "Maybe this is her version of a quicky?"

"If it's the Marionette then was the doctor a sex worker or a John?" Zeller asked the room. "Why him?"

"I'm the connection," Will said.

"Now you have two serial killer courting you?" Price asked, incredulous.

"It's not the Marionette. It's the Copycat."

"It's her cable," Price insisted.

Letting the banter go on long enough, Jack turned to Will, eyes narrowed. "What do you remember?"

Will shrugged. "I remember coming here. Going into the MRI, getting out... and finding his body."

"No confusion?" Jack asked.

Will smirked, hunching in on himself. "I don't -- I was confused getting here. Not getting out of the MRI."

"This Dr. Sutcliffe," Jack went on. "Does he usually see patients after hours when he's the only one in the office?"

"He was very accommodating." Will said blandly.

"So the Copycat Killer followed you here, and then, while you were ticking away in the MRI, he tied the doctor up like the Marionette?" Jack wasn't buying it, and Will felt a hot flash of anger. "Why him?"

"Because he's fucking stalking me!" Will snapped. "I told you. The Copycat found someone who looks just like me and tied them up in the aquarium, next to the god damn fishes. I'm your fisherman, Jack."

The room was painfully silent. Price's jaw was dropped nearly to his feet.

As expected, Jack responded to anger with anger, his voice rising. "Why you, Will?"

Will threw up his hands in the air. "I don't know, Jack," he hissed. "I have a habit of collecting strays. These killers want their audience and I know how to look, I'm the one who can appreciate their show."

Jack's jaw was clenched so hard a vein was popping.

"Uh, Will," Beverly said quietly. "Your phone. It's been ringing."

Will tore his eyes away from Jack. He reached into his pants and pulled out his phone -- it was Hannibal.

"This conversation isn't over--" Jack started to say.

"Hello," Will answered.

"Will!" Hannibal sounded immensely relieved. "Are you alright? Your car is still at the hospital and there are police cars here, what's going on?"

"I'm --" His voice caught in his throat. "I'm alright. Physically." He ignored Jack's glaring.

"They won't let me inside," Hannibal said, his voice high.

"Don't come in, Hannibal." Will ran a hand through his hair. "Dr. Sutcliffe is dead."

There was silence on the other line. Everyone was looking at Will, and he covered his eyes. "Wait for me," Will said into the silence on the other end. "I need to... finish up here."

"Alright," Hannibal said stiffly.

Will lowered the phone in shaking hands. "Are you going to take me in, Jack?" Will asked.

"The fuck he is!" Beverly snapped.

"Katz!" Jack bellowed. "Calm down."

"I didn't kill him, Jack," Will said.

"I have to treat you like a suspect," Jack said, full of regret but firm. "You were the only one we know who was here."

"It was the Copycat," Will said, punctuating every word.

"What did he take, then?" Jack asked. "There's no trophy collection, Will."

"It must have been a quick job," Price offered nervously. "He didn't have time?"

"Or it's the Marionette," Zeller said, "And Will's got super serial-killer pheromones. I mean, with that face--"

"Quiet!" Jack bellowed.

Will's limbs felt like lead. "Take me in or let me see my boyfriend," he said quietly, defeated. "I'm not going to skip town."

Jack sighed audibly. "Alright. If Katz is done then you can go. I want you to report in tomorrow though."

Beverly escorted Will out, not touching him but glaring daggers at everyone who even thought about looking their way. "I don't believe for a minute that you did this," she said under her breath.

"Wish I was that confident," Will muttered.

"Hey." She stopped abruptly. Will did as well, watching her out of the corner of his eye. "What the hell is that supposed to mean? What's going on with you?"

Will gnawed at the inside of his cheek. "I don't know." He reached into his coat and pulled out a ziplock bag, handing it to Beverly. "Can you do me a favor? I need to know if this matches the wire found at the last crime scene."

"Jesus, Will." Beverly took the bag of barbed wire. "Where did you find this?"

Will grimaced. "I don't remember."

He walked out, leaving Beverly behind.

Outside the night was illuminated by the lights of police car sirens and the flash of cameras. Will waded through the scene, cutting to the side in order to avoid the news crews, and ducking under the yellow police tape. It was too bright against the night, too many sensory pieces of information boring into him. The sound of footsteps behind him made Will twitch and turn around abruptly, heart in his throat -- It was Hannibal.

The sensory overload eased as he looked at the man who was his anchor, his paddle. His brow was furrowed with worry, eyes searching Will's, and the expression didn't quite fit Hannibal. Worry didn't line up and there was something behind it, dark and aching.

"Will." Hannibal took him into his arms, holding him tightly and caressing the back of his head. "I was worried..." his voice trailed off.

Will held his breath. It was like the night Tobias attacked them both. He should reassure Hannibal, tell him that he was alright -- but he wasn't. Not in the slightest. He wanted to give in to the comfort of Hannibal's arms but his heart was walling up brick by brick.

"I need a tetanus shot," Will said into his shoulder. "Do you have one? At your house."

Hannibal pulled back, looking puzzled. "Yes, as it so happens." He glanced down over Will's body. "Are you hurt?"

Will pulled away. "I'll drive my own car."

Hannibal released him, saying, "I would really prefer to drive you."

"It'll be easier than having to drive me back here."

"Will--"

Fuck. Will laughed, rubbing his eyes. The logistics of this was getting in the way. Whatever. He'd take a cab back to his car if he had to. "Fine. Fine."

A stiff silence descended on them as they got into Hannibal's car and drove off. Will kept stealing glances at Hannibal while he drove, thinking of tracing the line of his profile with charcoal, everything on the page black save for the light moving across his features. Whenever Hannibal glanced back Will would drop his eyes, until it was clear that he didn't want eye contact and Hannibal stared straight ahead, letting Will look.

"What happened, Will?"

"I lost time again. While heading home from seeing Jack, and when I was in the MRI. It's..." He licked his lips. "Confused. I felt disoriented. Not the clean break of memory from before. When I came out of the MRI I walked into Dr. Sutcliffe's office and he was dead. Like the Marionette had killed him."

Hannibal's face was very still as he lingered on every word. The news of his former colleague's death seemed to glance off, like the golden glow of street lamps passing rhythmically.

"If it was the Copycat, I don't know why he didn't kill me," Will went on. "I was just lying there, out of my mind with my earplugs in. He could have put on a nurse's uniform and slid me out of the tunnel and do whatever it is he wants to do to me."

"But he didn't. If he was scared off--"

"No." Will shook his head. "He had plenty of time to kill Dr. Sutcliffe and myself. He took his time with him, as if he was the primary target." He smiled, his tone almost light. "He doesn't want me dead."

Hannibal's hands clenched on the wheel. "What does he want with you then?"

Maybe if Will didn’t say the answer, or even think it, it wouldn’t have to be true. His limbs felt like lead but they weren’t as heavy as his numb heart, which weighed in his chest, weight enough to

split flesh on taut metal wire. There was no reason for the Copycat Killer to keep him alive unless there was a more elaborate torture waiting ahead.

Unless he was the Copycat.

Will stared ahead. “I’m breaking up with you.”

Leather twisted under Hannibal’s hands. They came to a stoplight. Will felt… nothing. Maybe he hadn’t even said it aloud. He couldn’t trust himself to even do that. But Hannibal was so stiff he wasn’t breathing, until he inhaled sharply through his nostrils, and when the light turned green the car accelerated forward with an extra kick. Will had said it. Hannibal had heard it. He could hear Hannibal’s lips and jaw working as he struggled to chose his words.

“I don’t accept that,” Hannibal quietly growled.

There wasn’t enough in Will to laugh. “That’s your problem.”

Hannibal’s breath caught in his throat. “Cruel boy…”

Will rested his elbow on the lip of the window and leaned into his hand, eyes skating over the streets they passed. Hannibal was hurting now, but that was acceptable, because Will was saving him hurt in the long run. Either Will had a serial killer on his tail, killing the people around him; or Will was that killer and couldn’t control his own actions. It was a simple decision, ultimately.

“Just like that?” Hannibal said in the wake of Will’s silence. “After all we have been through? After I have walked through the fire with you, again and again; proven my devotion; given pieces of myself to you that no others have seen? After everything, you would close the door in some misguided attempt at keeping me safe?”

“The only way I can,” Will muttered.

“There are a million ways for us to die,” Hannibal said, eyes piercing the road ahead. “Each day could be our last, and I refuse to live my life governed by such piteous fear. You live your life in the shadow of losses yet to come, but we are here now, Will, we can live.”

“It’s refreshing to see you angry,” Will said quietly. None of Hannibal’s barbs fell home.

A moment of quiet, the car gliding along Baltimore's streets. “You sound like a man who has made up his mind,” Hannibal replied bitterly.

“I’m—“ Will stopped himself. If he said that he was sorry, he was pretty sure that he would break down. “I’ll get out and get a cab back to my car.”

“No.” Hannibal swallowed. “You need medical attention. I can give you that much, can’t I?”

Will clamped down at the moan deep in his throat. Fuck. His eyes burned, his head was splitting and his feet ached terribly, but by sheer force of will he kept the tears at bay and shut down those feelings. They kept threatening to seep up through the cracks.

Hannibal pulled the car into the driveway.

They walked to the front door, Will hanging a few steps behind to keep space in between them as Hannibal unlocked the door. He was going to keep his coat on but Hannibal gave him an annoyed look, so Will hung it up.

“You can wait in the study while I get my supplies,” Hannibal said in a stilted, overly professional voice. Will shrugged, eyes kept low.

In the study Will flopped onto the armchair. There was no fire in the fireplace. Of course there wasn't, but usually when he was here he would put a few logs on while Hannibal did the dishes. Without the fire the room seemed dead. He untied and carefully removed his shoes and socks. The bandages he had haphazardly wrapped around his feet had bled through. As he removed them, the scabs were pulled back, and he hissed in pain. “Fuck.” Blood was dripping freely, and he tried to catch it in the gauze before it stained Hannibal’s carpet.

Hannibal appeared by his side, medical kit in hand, pausing in shock at what he saw. He hesitated only a moment before he was kneeling before Will, taking his foot in hand. His suit jacket and waistcoat were removed, the sleeves of his shirt rolled up, latex gloves already on. Will couldn’t completely avoid his face now, and saw that his eyes were shining with unshed tears.

“What happened?” Hannibal asked.

Will leaned back in the chair, huffing out a sigh. “I must have wrapped my feet in barbed wire at some point today. And then I just. Made myself ignore it, or forget it. Walked on them all day until I got home and then I realized.”

Hannibal cradled his foot delicately, inspecting the wounds the barbs had left. He took some antiseptic on a cotton swab and began to clean the punctures. It was clinical. Mostly. But there was a thread of reverence, and Will wondered if this was the last time they would touch. Did they have their last kiss that morning? The thought sunk heavy in his chest.

“Your mind is closing doors on you,” Hannibal observed. “Keeping you in the dark. But in those unlit corridors, you are still yourself, wounding yourself so that you might not hurt others, coming to me bloody so I can heal you.”

“The fantasies are coming to life,” Will said, feeling like they were back in a session. “But I can’t control how they manifest.”

“Consciously control,” Hannibal amended. He finished cleaning one foot and began unwrapping the other. Will clenched his jaw as the wounds were reopened, fists balled on the arms of the chair. “Do you believe that you killed Dr. Sutcliffe?” Hannibal asked.

Will breathed through his teeth. Blood was wiped away, then there was the familiar sting of the antiseptic. “I think it’s possible that I did so unconsciously,” Will admitted.

Hannibal looked up, and Will caught a glimpse of glinting amber before he wrenched his eyes away. “Was what you saw in his office your fantasy come to life?” Hannibal asked.

“The last one certainly was,” Will said tightly. “A surrogate of myself, tangled up in wire. Freddie’s surrogate. I was mad at Sutcliffe, I —“ He laughed darkly. “His failure to find anything ruined me… ruined this…”

Hannibal began wrapping his feet. His hands were so gentle. “Do you remember when you sat in this very room and asked me what I would do if you killed someone?”

Will just nodded.

“I want to protect you, Will. If you will let me.” His hands slowed in their task of wrapping bandages, and he slid a hand up to squeeze Will’s ankle, rubbing the bones under his thumb.

Will felt the claws cinch around his throat, tears burning behind his eyes. He tried to laugh and it came out like an aborted sob. “To hell and back, hm?” The words were muffled behind his hand as he rubbed his jaw, staring at the empty fire place. “This is me telling you not to look back, Orpheus.”

Hannibal ran his hands up Will’s legs, lifting up on his knees, and Will didn’t stop him but he turned his face even further away, retreating. “I don’t accept any reality where the two of us do not walk out together alive,” Hannibal said.

“Don’t tempt me,” Will pleaded, even as Hannibal ran his hands up his thighs and pushed up between them.

“How could I?” Hannibal whispered, hands on his hips now. “How could I turn around and watch you disappear — it’s impossible.”

“If I hurt you…” Will turned his head as far to the side as he could, eyes shut closed. “I can’t survive that.”

“You can survive,” Hannibal insisted, and god, Will wanted to believe him. “No matter what happens, you will survive."

Hannibal waited for Will to look at him. When he didn't, Hannibal sat back on his heels, hands brushing down Will's thighs. "Take off your shirt," Hannibal said coldly. "For the tetanus shot."

Will pulled the flannel shirt off over his head while Hannibal prepared the shot. He offered his left arm and Hannibal took it, leaning up with the needle in his other hand. Puncture. Needle depression. Will watched and choked down his feelings. He would leave and get a cab back to the hospital and --

Hannibal rested his head on Will's chest, breathing deeply. Will felt his breath sink through his skin. Hannibal’s hands snaked up the soft flesh above Will's hips, gentle caresses at first and then gripping hard. When he spoke his lips brushed Will's sternum. "Do you think I can let you go?"

"I've made up my mind," Will said weakly.

Hannibal growled and yanked Will's hips forward until he was flush with his abdomen, kissing above Will's heart. "Hannibal!" Will exclaimed, putting his hands on his shoulders. "Please don't, I'm--"

Hannibal opened his mouth and bared his teeth against the skin of Will's chest, tongue searing hot. "Aah ahnn!" Will choked on a moan, throat tight and tears threatening again. Hannibal wanted him so fucking much it made Will dizzy.

"I don't have it in me to let you go," Hannibal said in a husky voice. His fingers splayed over Will's lower back, dipping beneath the waistband of his pants.

“Stop, Hannibal.” Will pushed back on his shoulders, but Hannibal resisted. Will shoved. Hannibal yanked him closer, his ass half off the cushion now, neck cramped against the back of the chair. “Hannibal!”

“You know how to get me to stop,” Hannibal growled, placing hard, wet kisses against his chest.

Will’s breath came in hard. Anger flared in his chest. “This isn’t a fucking scene!”

“Will…” The need in his voice struck through Will, pinning him in place. He dug his nails into Hannibal’s shirt. Hannibal kissed up to his neck, teeth gliding over skin. “Say it,” Hannibal growled in his ear. “If you truly don’t want me, if you don’t want this — say it.”

Will whined, thumping his head against the cushion of the chair. Each breath came in harsh, like a sob. Hannibal wanted him. Hannibal needed him. His resolve was slipping, Hannibal was pressed against the length of his abdomen, civility discarded, gloves still on. Desperate. Without hearing an answer, Hannibal kissed Will.

Fuck.

A mangled sound broke from Will. Hannibal sucked on his upper lip. Slid his tongue along his teeth. Grabbed his ass. Moaned into Will’s mouth. God, Hannibal made him feel so weak, helpless, safe.

Hannibal broke their kiss and Will gasped for breath, slipping out of the chair. Hannibal pulled him into his lap, legs splayed wide. "Every time you’ve tried to push me away, you’ve failed,” Hannibal said against his mouth. He dug his thumbs on the inside of Will’s hips. “What makes you think you will succeed now?”

“I don’t know,” Will panted. “I guess I thought you would respect my decision.”

Hannibal kissed him. Will grabbed his hair and yanked his head back. “*Obsidian*,” Will said firmly. “Obsidian. I’m done Hannibal. I’m done.”

For a moment, Hannibal’s grip remained on Will’s hips, and he breathed against his mouth, eyes full of hunger and rage. Then, slowly, he relaxed his hands, rested them atop Will’s thighs, and leaned back.

Will was angry. Anger that had been simmering for days suddenly flashed white hot through his abdomen, and he put his hand under Hannibal’s jaw and pushed him to the floor; and Hannibal went so pliantly that Will snarled in fury; and he was on top of Hannibal with both hands around his throat, squeezing down. “You bastard,” Will hissed, the skin of Hannibal’s neck going white and then red around his palms. “You fucking bastard. You think I want to let you go? How *dare* you make this harder on me? How dare you?!”

Hannibal’s mouth was lax, choked, his eyes slightly glazed but unwavering. His palms were open by his sides. “Is this what you want?!” Will shouted, bearing down on Hannibal’s neck. "You want me to hurt you, choke you out? You think I'm going to stop? You think this is going to be okay?!"

"Will." There was no sound, just the shape of his name in Hannibal's mouth.

"Stop me!" Will yelled. "You think this is a game?!"

Hannibal's hands remained soft by his sides. His eyes fluttered, he couldn't breathe at all, and Will felt each beat of his blood through his hands, steady and strong. The veins under his skin were bulging, his eyes were slits, a wet gleam on his lips -- but he looked angelic. Like Will's hands stealing his breath was a sacrament. Will could hold on until Hannibal was unconscious and Hannibal would fucking let him.

"Fuck you." Will dug his fingernails into Hannibal's neck and then pushed off, trying to stand and back away but slipping as pain shot through his feet. He stumbled back into the chair, panting, glaring at where Hannibal lay on the rug, gasping for air.

Will watched his chest heave up and down. There were damp patches of sweat under his arms. The seconds ticked by a measure too slow. Hannibal stared up at the ceiling, tears gathered in the corner of his eyes, and Will told himself they were just from choking.

In another minute, he would leave.

Just another moment, here.

One last moment.

"You are not the only one who protects himself from loss," Hannibal said from the floor, his voice dry and broken. "When Lady Murasaki rejected me I told myself there would be no other. She... no. I will not trap you here by telling you more."

A tear slipped down his cheek. Will looked away.

"I'm sorry, Will. Maybe I've made a mistake."

Will's chest heaved, and his own tear spilled down his cheek. He quickly wiped it away, hating the symmetry. "I can't do this." Couldn't stay, couldn't leave — he would not survive this.

Maybe it didn't matter if Will got up and left now or crawled over Hannibal and kissed his tears away; he didn't feel like he had agency anymore. The two of them were hurtling forward on a path and Will was blind to it, the loss he had anticipated this entire time rearing up and swallowing him whole. "I'm going to talk to Alana and check myself into a hospital," Will said.

Hannibal sat up slowly and faced Will, the trail of the tear darkening the skin of his cheek. "There is another option," he said, sounding like they were in a session once more save for the roughness to his voice. His eyes were clear, blank. "Alana and I could watch over you as an out-patient. I truly believe that, even if you don't remember what you do when you lose time, that you are still yourself."

"There's a killer after me, Hannibal," Will said in a defeated voice. "I don't want to put you or Alana in danger."

"Is there? Or did you kill Dr. Sutcliffe?"

Will shrugged. "I guess Jack will find out soon."

"I don't believe that you killed him," Hannibal said softly.

Will looked back at him sharply. Hannibal was being honest, and he was Will's guide in these uncertain waters. Could he trust his judgement? Hannibal always seemed like a force of nature, and Will wanted to believe that he could control the maelstrom of violence surrounding Will; but he was only human. "I didn't think I was a man to break my feet bloody," he hissed. "I didn't think I would choke you in rage. Now I don't know what kind of man I am."

"You fear not knowing who you are," Hannibal said. "Those violent actions are familiar to you now -- we have engaged in both. Why would you wrap your feet in barbed wire?"

"You think it was to punish myself?" Will hid his face behind his hand. "I think I'm telling myself that there's a danger I'm not seeing." His mind wandered to the crime scene. Killing Dr. Sutcliffe had been premeditated: the killer brought a heavy winch, an impact drill, and plenty of cable. The killer wasn't confused. Will closed his eyes and tried to remember driving to the hospital, but it was fuzzy. He tried to imagine himself getting out of the MRI, changing back into his clothes, going to Dr. Sutcliffe's office, incapacitating him, leaving him to fetch supplies from his car -- it didn't add up at all.

"I know I didn't kill him consciously," Will said. "It's unlikely that I did at all." He sighed. Time kept slipping away from him and he needed to get his feet on the ground, grasp his situation. All he had were the worn end of threads. He needed to be able to think. "I need some fresh air," he said, standing carefully on his bandaged feet. "Please give me a minute."

In the corner of his eyes, Hannibal nodded. Will picked up his shirt and limped out of the room. Pulling the shirt over his head he went to the kitchen. Fuck it. He stopped in the pantry to grab a bottle of whiskey and a glass, taking both outside. Will sat on the lip by the sliding door, staring into Hannibal's backyard, walled off from the rest of the world by high hedges and trees. He poured too much whiskey, not caring as it slopped off the side of the tumbler, and took a long drink.

Will didn't feel like himself. Fear was changing him. He could barely remember the feeling of dark control his fantasies had once afforded him, the self-effacing pleasure of sitting in Hannibal's office and trying to shock him. Lately the predominant feeling had been fear -- fear that he was ruining his relationship with Hannibal, fear that he was losing control of himself, fear that he truly wanted to hurt other people. He had stopped taking control of the fantasies, stopped indulging in them. Because he was worried they would come to life? Or because, as Hannibal said, he couldn't accept himself and the violence that killing Hobbs had awakened in him.

Will was either about to give up and let the world happen to him, or he needed to reclaim his agency. Hard to be in control of yourself when you were not always conscious of your actions.

He knew it was cold out but Will didn't feel it, not even with his bare, gauze-wrapped feet on the garden tile. The pain helped him focus. He felt sick, really sick, like maybe he was dying. *They didn't find anything.* He took another gulp of whiskey, feeling it burn down his throat. It was becoming difficult to think, but he needed to hold on to this moment of clarity, grab it by the neck --

Hannibal.

Will couldn't lie to him. He wouldn't. If anyone could talk Will down from the nightmare, even if he was totally lost in it, it would be Hannibal. Hannibal knew the twists and turns of his mind, anticipated his wants and needs before Will was even conscious of them, and had always been able to navigate them back from the cliff's edge. Maybe the question wasn't what Will couldn't survive, but what Hannibal could.

The cold sunk into his feet. Will finished the glass of whiskey and poured himself another, already feeling drunk. He idly watched the shadows move in the yard, the large trees shifting in the wind. He looked up at the sky, knowing he would see nothing but cloud and light pollution, but feeling that the air above him was clearer than it had been in days.

There was a knock on the glass behind him, and Will turned his head, giving a little nod. Hannibal slid the door open. He draped a blanket over Will's shoulders and then sat next to him, tucking his frozen feet into the warmth of the blanket.

"I see you've helped yourself," Hannibal said. He took the tumbler from Will's hands and sipped from it.

Will smiled. Maybe it was just the whiskey. Everything felt a little softer around the edges. The blanket helped. Hannibal refilled the glass and took another sip, a little more greedy than he usually was with liquor. "I need to apologize, Will," Hannibal said as they both watched the darkness. "That was an unacceptable way to treat you. I'm sorry."

Will took the glass back, and drank from it. "Sorry for choking you," he said, smiling at the absurdity.

"You're smiling." Hannibal sounded surprised.

"I'm drunk. And wires are crossed." He bit his lip. "Not sure my brain knows the difference between crying and smiling anymore."

"You've always smiled in uncomfortable or painful situations," Hannibal observed. "As a failed deflection when you feel hurt."

The smile eased away. Will's chest burned. "I'm in pain," he said.

"I know."

Will passed him back the glass of whiskey. That was all he wanted: those simple words, the acknowledgement, the act of being witnessed. Will was in pain, and Hannibal knew, and in that moment that was the only thing that mattered. Will looked at him, and Hannibal looked back. "I trust you," Will said. "I trust you to survive me."

"I will," Hannibal said. "I promise."

Reciprocal Mirror

Chapter Summary

Will Graham is losing time.

Chapter Notes

hi everyone! if you're reading this that means you've gotten through over 130k words of smutty psychological horror and sexy murder. jfc. well done.

the rest of this fic is going to be dark and intense (you know, like before, but much more) so I'm asking you to trust me as we descend into hell. I haven't written this much struggle for Will to leave him broken in the dark; I haven't alluded to what Hannibal is doing off screen to leave that unresolved and hidden; and I haven't written so much porn to leave you unsatisfied. trust me. all I'm going to ask from you is patience, as some of the resolution of this gory mess takes place in a sequel fic i'm planning as we speak.

content warnings are going to be in the end notes so I don't spoil anything. I'm not throwing in anything new and will be treating things much the same way as before. just. more. at the end of the day, this is an erotic horror story, so I'm going to continue to make fucked up shit titillating.

hang in there. Will is.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal and Will sat on the edge of the garden until the cold seeped through the blanket wrapped around Will, and even then he didn't want to move and break the moment. Hannibal must have been cold as well, just in his suit. The winter temperatures were holding on.

"Outpatient observation, huh?" Will said into the night. "Not sure I like the idea of having a chaperone."

"More freedom than in an institution. And you would only be monitored by psychiatrists you trust."

Will looked over at him. Hannibal looked back. There was a distance between them now, walls in the fortress newly erected. Will glanced at the bruises forming on Hannibal's neck above the rumpled state of his collar. "Do you want me to get you anything for that?"

"No. I'd rather feel it."

Will winced, and his eyes dropped. Of course Hannibal wanted to feel it. He wanted the hurt to be real. Will wanted to know what the fuck to say in this situation. There was no script, no allegory, no finely crafted shadow play of words. Perhaps he had said enough. He couldn't think of a thing to say that wouldn't just wound Hannibal further.

"You should come inside," Hannibal said at last. "You're cold."

"I don't feel cold," Will said.

"You're drunk."

Will glanced down at the glass and whiskey bottle between them. "Are you?"

Hannibal didn't answer. He rose to his feet, and looked down at Will. With a sigh, Will got to his tender feet. "I feel like an asshole asking to stay over," Will said as they walked through the house.

"You will stay here for the duration of your observation," Hannibal said in a flat, sure voice.

"Jesus, Hannibal." Will glanced at him, stopping at the bottom of the stairs. "I can't ask that of you, not after..."

Hannibal looked at him with a blank expression. "You are not asking me. I am telling you. We can try to arrange for a sleep lab, but for at least for tonight, you will stay here. I am not comfortable letting you sleep in a house by yourself."

Will prickled, but was too tired and drunk to protest the controlling attitude. He rubbed his eyes. "Fine." They went upstairs and Will turned into the guest bedroom. "Goodnight, Hannibal," he said, not trusting himself to look back.

He could only move forward.

This was the second time he was staying in the guest bedroom -- and he realized with bitter amusement that both times had been after choking Hannibal. Not a pattern he wanted to repeat. Just as beautifully and obsessively decorated as the rest of the house, it was less personal than the bedroom. A queen-sized bed lay against the middle of the far wall, framed by a carved wood headboard and two still life paintings, everything in warm, rich colors. Will pulled off his shirt and kicked off his jeans, falling on top of the bed in utter exhaustion. He doubted he would be able to sleep.

His mind felt heavy and hot, like warm water was sloshing inside of his skull. He tossed and turned, fretting, sweating, slipping in and out of awareness. There was a huge body of water beneath him, churning waves eager to swallow him whole, to drag him under, the undulations of black water making him nauseous. The frustration of not being able to sleep was a terrible itch all over his body. Groaning, Will pushed himself to sitting, rubbing his aching eyes. It was lighter in the room now, so he must have slept, it --

He wasn't in the guest room.

Will turned in the bed -- Hannibal's bed -- and saw his sleeping form in the act of waking, turning towards him, eyes fluttering open. Will's heart started racing, and he looked around. Yes, this was Hannibal's bedroom.

"Will?" Hannibal asked in a gravely voice, pushing up to his elbows. "Did you have a nightmare?"

Will shook his head. "I'm fine. Go back to sleep." He ran his hand through his hair -- he was sweating, badly.

Hannibal looked at him for a moment. "Will. This won't work if you aren't honest with me."

Will shuddered, wiping the sweat away from his brow. His feet ached and he could still feel the lulling throb of alcohol. "I thought I went to sleep in the guest room."

"You did. You came here when you were having trouble sleeping." Factual. Concern well-hidden.

"Right." His mouth was dry. "I don't remember that." He got up and walked to the bathroom, splashing water on his face and drinking from the faucet. He toweled himself off. When he came back Hannibal was sitting up in bed, wearing only his pajama pants.

Will lingered by the bed. He could see the dark spot on the sheets from his sweaty back. "Did we...?"

Hannibal looked at him, eyes tired and hard. "You kissed me."

"Right." The word barely came out. He cleared his throat. "No more of that. Please don't accept that from me."

Hannibal's jaw clenched. "Let's chalk it up to the alcohol, then."

Fuck. "I'm sorry." He didn't know whether to stay or to go.

With a sigh, Hannibal patted the bed next to him. "You're likely to just sleepwalk back here. Try to get some sleep."

Will curled up near the edge of the bed, his back to Hannibal.

Maybe he slept. Maybe he was awake. It was morning. It was breakfast. They were eating in the dining room as opposed to the kitchen. More formal. A retreat to their former relationship. Will touched his hair -- it was damp, he had showered. "I'm slipping," he said.

Hannibal paused to observe him. "What's the last thing you remember?"

Will took up the coffee mug. "How many times have you asked me that this morning?" He smiled bitterly, tasting the aromatic coffee, burning hot --

A styrofoam cup. He was in the BAU conference room, Hannibal next to him. Jack was speaking to the room, which was filled with agents.

"Hannah Reid. Also known as the Marionette Murderer," Jack said. "31 year old sex worker. At least nine victims, most of whom were male clients, three of which were FBI agents who were killed in traps she laid."

It was surprisingly easy to remain calm, or at least, control himself so his panic wasn't apparent. He was losing intervals of time, but unlike the first instance Will forced his panic down to a tame coil in his stomach. He knew how to act like he was fine and functional; he had been practicing for this his whole life. Will glanced around. He and Hannibal were sitting in the back of the room, which

had been transformed into a command center. There were area maps of Baltimore displayed, as well as multiple pictures of Hannah Reid. The manhunt was in full swing.

"Her primary weapon is industrial steel cable. She also lays traps. Pit falls. Barbed wire. Acid. This is a creative killer whose downfall will be her complexity."

Will glanced over at Hannibal and caught his eye. Hannibal tilted his head as if asking a question, and Will tapped his wrist watch. Nodding, Hannibal opened a small black leather notebook and marked a note.

"We've traced purchases and have a possible sighting," Jack continued. "She's using a covered truck, partial license plate 76AG. She'll be scouting locations -- warehouses, construction sites, abandoned buildings.

Will observed the room, eyes passing over the back of heads. Jack's voice was echoing strangely in the space, and the buzzing of the overhead lights speared into his mind. The buzzing increased, Jack's voice was vibrating, Will's mind was vibrating. The rush of his blood and beating of his heart seemed to surround him, as if he could only hear from within the echo chambers of his body, Jack's voice distant now. Sweat dripped down the side of his face, and Will wiped it away --

The room was filled with antlers. Like Hobb's hunting cabin, overlaid seamlessly with the conference room. Everyone was gone save for Jack and Hannibal standing next to him, just a sliver in the corner of his eye. His head was pounding. The antlers were closing in, and then --

Jack looked directly at Will. "When we find her, we'll be walking into a trap."

Will snapped back to himself. The room was filled with shuffling agents, the briefing over. No antlers, no drowning in the sound of his own blood. He breathed deeply, sweat tickling the back of his neck, an aching pressure in his head. He became aware that Hannibal was watching him. "I hallucinated," he told him under his breath.

They went to Will's office at the Academy to meet Alana. Hannibal proposed their outpatient observation (babysitting) of Will, while Will tried to remain conscious. Consciously conscious. Alana kept glancing at him full of worry and he sort of wish she wouldn't. He didn't want to be looked at or touched lest it distrupt the reality of his existence.

"We'll have to compare schedules," Alana said to Hannibal. "I'm willing to try this though."

"Have to put my dogs up in a kennel," Will said from the chair behind his desk. It was the first thing he had said in a while.

"I can take them," Alana said, as if the words tripped from her tongue.

Will huffed a laugh. "There are seven, Alana."

"I'll pay for their boarding," Hannibal said. "We can find a place more suitable than a kennel."

Will glared at him for a moment. That was something a boyfriend did, and they weren't, not anymore. Hannibal returned his look with some irritation. It would be stupid to fight about that; Will rubbed his face hard, wondering if he had really managed to break up with Hannibal in any way besides technically.

"This isn't a permanent solution," Will said, changing the subject.

"Getting away from work and taking some time to recuperate will help," Alana said. "Then we re-evaluate."

"Still think it's just trauma, Dr. Bloom?"

"My position hasn't changed since yesterday." She glanced between Will and Hannibal. "Did something happen at the crime scene?"

"I've been losing time," Will said.

"Likely an acute form of disassociation," Hannibal interjected.

"I just hallucinated," Will spat. "An hour ago. Don't feed me the trauma line again."

Alana frowned, examining Hannibal before turning back to Will. "What did you see?"

"A thicket of antlers," Will said slowly, feeling the shape of them behind his eyes. "All I heard was my heart dim but fast, like footsteps fleeing into silence."

Alana considered. "Have you noticed if these hallucinations occur at a particular time of day?"

"Usually later in the day, at night. This was strange."

"Are you more sensitive to light than you used to be?" Alana asked next.

"Maybe." Will licked his lips. "Yeah."

Hannibal gave Alana a sharp look. "Sundowning?" She gave Hannibal a sympathetic smile.

"What's that?" Will asked, picking up on the anxiety between the two of them.

Hannibal let out an almost imperceptible sigh. "It’s a state of confusion experienced at the end of the day," he explained. "When there are more shadows. It commonly occurs in the elderly."

The elderly. Anxiety tightened around his neck, dread and longing and cold fear. "Is it a symptom of dementia?"

"It can be," Alana said quietly.

Will stared at her. He was losing his mind. *He was losing his mind* -- it was melting in his skull, all the contours that separated himself from the world dissolving, no barriers left to protect him, just a flayed nerve defenseless against the onslaught. Dementia. "People with dementia have all sorts of sleep disorders and disruptions," he said. It made sense.

"They can experience episodes of hallucinations, sleep walking," Hannibal added.

"Memory loss." Will gritted his teeth. It fit too damn well -- but why? How? At his age...

"Yes," Hannibal agreed, voice tight. "Also, personality changes."

Will frowned at that. "Has my personality changed?"

Alana and Hannibal shared a look. She spoke first. "You seem like yourself, but more raw. Afraid."

"Other people have never been particularly good gauges for who I am," Will muttered. "I see what they want to see, and in seeing..." He trailed off. Rested his head on his hand.

"You've never feared hurting others before," Alana said. "The Will I know wouldn't be able to hurt someone."

"Tell that to Garett Jacob Hobbs," Will said. *Tell that to Hannibal.*

"Do you think your personality has changed?" Hannibal asked.

Had it? Had he? If Will was a house of mirrors then how on earth was he supposed to tell where he ended and others began? Before Hobbs, he could always come back to himself; or maybe he just didn't need to know who he was because he was stable and could just *be*. Will Graham, the socially inept professor who had too many dogs and fished. Will Graham, the psychology anomaly, too smart for his own good. "I don't know how to gauge who I am anymore," Will said. "I don't feel like myself. I feel like I've been gradually becoming different for a while... Now I just feel like somebody else."

Will closed his eyes. Just a moment of rest. His eyes ached so terribly. He rubbed them with his fingers, seeing colors splotch on his eyelids.

When he opened them, only Alana was in the room. She was sitting now, hands folded in her lap, flipping through a black leather notebook. Hannibal's notebook. The notebook on him.

Will sat up straight. Wondered if he could get away with asking her what they were doing here. "Are we just going to sit here?" he asked.

Alana looked up, fingers stilling over a page. "It seemed like you didn't want to talk about it."

Will tried to backtrack, but he came up with blank. He could infer, though. "I broke up with Hannibal," he said.

Alana glanced back at the notebook. "So you said."

"Did I?" Will asked quietly.

"You lost time again?"

"I'm fading in and out." Will took a deep breath. There was a bottle of water on his desk and he drank from it gratefully. "I tried to break up with him," he clarified. "I don't really know if I succeeded. He didn't accept it at first. And now this."

"He's a forceful personality," Alana said. "A gentle force, but still."

"Like the tides."

"What were the reasons you decided to end your romantic relationship?"

So technical. Like Will could disentangle his romantic relationship with Hannibal from their professional relationship and their friendship. None of those terms even made sense for them anymore. "I need to protect him. I can't be in a relationship while I'm half out of my mind."

Alana tilted her head, eyes narrowed in consideration. "Is there a reason that has to do with how you feel about Hannibal and the relationship?"

"Not wanting to hurt Hannibal is a feeling."

She gave him a look of mild annoyance. "Is that the only one?"

"I didn't want to break up with him. I liked being with him, the unaccustomed security of being wanted and cared for. It put me on edge because I'm so unfamiliar with it."

"Sounds nice," Alana said with a smile. "If a bit frightening."

Will smirked. "Hard to trust. Hard-won trust. And the relationship was... is... intense. The most intense relationship I've ever been in." He bit his lip. "We've never said 'I love you'. Always dancing around it, holding it at bay." He drifted off into silence.

"Hannibal cares for you very much," Alana said.

"Maybe if I come out the other side we can start again," Will said to his hands. "I know he's in an unfair position now."

"Hannibal put you in an unfair position," Alana reminded him. "He only has himself to thank for where he is now." She hesitated, weighing her words carefully. "I trust Hannibal. He's an excellent psychiatrist and doctor, and he knows you well and wants to take care of you. This is still a very precarious position. When you're not in my care you'll be dependent on him."

Will bristled at that. "Do you think he's going to take advantage of the situation?"

Alana was softly thoughtful, brown hair framing her creamy skin, and a note of tension around her red lips. "Hannibal looks like a man who is suppressing his emotions during a stressful situation," she said. "I'm sure he means you no harm, but his personal feelings for you must impact how he treats you." A quiet smile, then. "Not even Hannibal can just shut off his feelings."

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The tide came in, surf dragging at Will's mind, making the edges bleed.

"Graham. *Will*."

He looked around. He was in an interrogation room, Beverly sitting across the table from him with a disgruntled look on her face. He checked his watch -- 3:12 PM. *I'm in the BAU. My name is Will Graham.*

"Did you hear what I said?" Beverly asked.

"No," Will replied, and before she could repeat what she said he jerked his head to the mirror and asked, "Is Alana or Hannibal watching?"

Beverly's eyes narrowed, flicking to the mirror and back. "Yeah, Bloom is observing."

Will looked at the reciprocal mirror with a bitter smirk. "Make another note for me," he called, voice dripping with sarcasm. If he was losing his mind he might as well have a sense of humor about it. Turning back to Beverly he asked, "Now what was your question?"

With an irritated pout she said, "Its Jack's question, not mine. I think this is ridiculous." She sighed. "Can you describe what you saw when you walked into Dr. Sutcliffe's office?"

"In graphic detail," Will said with bitter relish. "The hallway was deserted. It seemed like there was no one in the wing, quiet in the way hospitals rarely are. I saw a dark spot on the floor that could have been blood, and a smear on the doorknob. That was definitely blood. The door was cracked open a few inches as if waiting for me to enter. I called for Dr. Sutcliffe and heard no response, so I entered the office. The victim was laying prone on his back on the desk, bound by one inch gage steel cable. The cable had been tightened with a winch until the wood of the desk cracked and the victim's intestines burst forth. He was obviously dead. I sat in the hall and waited for the police to arrive, not wanting to contaminate the crime scene."

Beverly sighed, crossing her arms. "So you just waited in the hall until we arrived, right?"

"Yes."

"You didn't check to see if you were safe? If there was anyone else in the hospital wing?"

Will shrugged. "I didn't have my gun. No, I didn't check."

"If the killer had still been there--"

"The killer had a chance to kill me while I was in the MRI. And afterwards, yes."

"Any idea why he didn't?"

That wasn't Jack's question. Will could hear the curiosity in her voice. He shrugged again. Mouth tight. "My guess is as good as yours."

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Floating in and out. Alana escorting him home to take the dogs to her house. Long car rides full of silence. Looking down at his phone and looking up to see that his surroundings had changed. Now he was in Hannibal's kitchen, reading through Hannah Reid's emails to Marcus. Will checked the time. Nothing was clear cut anymore. It was like he had already gone and was living as an echoing imprint of himself before the world moved past him. Hannibal explained the meal to his two guests. Alana and Hannibal talked. Will was glad they were talking. He didn't join in. He had been trying to pay attention all day, but maybe now he should just let go.

The hot water on his skin brought him back a little more. He was in a shower, fist clenched against the tile wall. Maybe the Copycat would come in now and grab him by the hair, smash his head on the wall, and he could watch his own blood circling the drain while the Copycat did what he wanted with him. Whatever that was. What Will deserved. Tobias hadn't been worthy, but Will was. So the Copycat would make Will a play thing.

Will scrubbed his skin until it was pink. His fingers were pruned and the water cold. He shut off the water and stepped out. Dried himself off.

He looked in the mirror and saw himself. No, that wasn't Will Graham. It was Hobbs. It was Hannah Reid. It was Hannibal, opening the door to his bedroom. Too many reflections and all of them wrong.

In the dark there was warm flesh under his hands and Will jerked in shock -- but it was just Hannibal, arching up into his hands, panting heavily. It took a moment to realize that he was doing anything before Will stopped stroking Hannibal's cock. Hannibal was lying half on top of him, back to chest, underwear and pajama bottoms shoved down his corded thighs just enough so Will could get access. He was achingly hard and wet; so was Will, pressed up naked against Hannibal's ass. Skin on slick skin. Hot, prickling up his spine. There were new bite marks on the shoulder under Will's mouth.

His stomach seemed to drop out of his body.

"Will?" Hannibal asked between breaths. He sounded a bit broken.

Will couldn't really blame his past self for being weak. Hannibal was so close to him, filling his vision, his back heaving against Will with every deep breath, skin cool to the touch. Will felt his cock in his hand, slick and pulsing, the curls of grey hair tickling the side of his palm. He could smell Hannibal's heady sweat on his skin, and feel the thick muscles of his ass where his own cock was slotted perfectly on top. "I don't know if this is real," Will whispered, chest filling with panic.

For a moment Hannibal just breathed, turning his head slightly but unable to look back at Will, the graceful contours of his face glowing against the dark. "Perhaps we should treat it as a dream," he said between breaths, "a phantom of the night, banished by the rays of the sun."

It wasn't a dream. It was too detailed. Will felt simultaneously angry for Hannibal for accepting his advances and incredibly guilty for putting Hannibal through this. But maybe not as guilty as he should. There was a sick pleasure in denying Hannibal and then forcing him to accept what little Will gave. His grip tightened on Hannibal's cock and the man groaned, lips curling. The sound shot down his spine and made him leak. "If this is a dream then I can do whatever I want," Will said quietly. The panic needed direction, and cruelty was a sharp and sure blade.

Hannibal's breath hitched. "I'm glad that you're indulging in your desires," Hannibal said with a tremble. He slowly thrust into Will's fist, and back against his cock, and that set Will off. He ground his dick onto Hannibal's ass and sucked a mark into his shoulder, fisting Hannibal's cock so hard he made a pained sound.

"Then I'm going to take what I want." Will released Hannibal and took his own cock in hand, pushing it down between the cheeks of Hannibal's ass so it rubbed over his hole. He felt a cold stab of dread, and wondered if that was Hannibal's feeling instead of his own.

"Will." Hannibal was completely breathless, sounding just as choked as he did after Will left bruises on his neck. Hannibal turned to look back at him, still and yielding in the most terrible of ways, and when they locked eyes Will saw regret and resignation.

Black antler tines burst from Hannibal's eyes, and Will was no longer sure that he was awake.

Too quickly, like his brain was running slow, Hannibal maneuvered Will so he was straddling his lap, the antlers growing and obscuring his face. "Yes," Hannibal hissed from all around Will, voice thrumming with pleasure. Hannibal grabbed Will's wrists and guided his hands around his neck to match the dark bruises there. Will's lips parted in a moan, arousal burning through him desperate to be quenched. He squeezed down on Hannibal's throat, staring at the thicket of antlers that used to be Hannibal's face. Hips rocking. Arousal burning. His fingers sunk into the hot flesh of Hannibal's neck.

Will woke in the guest bedroom, hard and drenched in sweat. His heart was pounding so fiercely he thought he might be having a panic attack. Movement, then -- throwing off the blankets and yanking the sweat-soaked shirt off over his head, checking the phone for the time. "It's 6:44 AM," he said in a trembling voice. "I'm in Hannibal Lecter's house and my name is Will Graham."

He stumbled out the door for a shower.

Like a blink, he was in the halls of the BAU. Will stopped in his tracks. He checked his watch, nearly spilling the styrofoam cup of coffee in his hand. "10:21 AM," he muttered to himself. "I'm in the BAU. My name is Will Graham." And this was a fucking nightmare.

Neither of his chaperones were in sight. Will continued walking the way he had been. He checked his phone and was relieved to see it was the day he thought it was. He found Hannibal waiting outside Jack's office. He looked... normal. Bespoke brown plaid suit with a vibrant paisley tie and gold trim pocket square, because of course he was dressed to the nines. The sight of him anchored Will and eased his panic, a small part of him hating how weak and dependent that reaction made him feel. Will had no idea what he looked like but he imagined they were an odd pair.

"Jack can't spare a protective detail," Hannibal said. "Everyone is focusing on catching Hannah Reid."

"Let's hope my stalker is taking a break then." Will sipped at his coffee. "6:44 to 10:21."

"Your retention skills are still remarkable, even if your memory is repressed," Hannibal observed. He took the notebook out of his satchel and wrote down the times, frowning. "Your periods of lost time are getting longer."

"What do I seem like from the outside?" Will asked.

Hannibal shut the notebook and turned his attention to Will, professional in a way that used to be familiar. "You seem relatively normal, if reserved. You respond to prompts, take direction without confusion, and make your own decisions, like getting coffee. Occasionally you will disengage and it seems obvious to me that you are disassociating. You are functional but without a guiding hand I suspect you would have difficulty navigating yourself."

Will nodded. He wondered if any of what had happened last night was real. He wondered if they had already had their last kiss and Will would never remember it. "Come with me," he said, and walked down the hall.

In the bathroom Will locked the door behind them and pushed Hannibal so he was facing the sinks. "What are you doing?" Hannibal asked harshly as Will's hands came around his middle to unbutton his suit jacket and waistcoat.

"Checking something."

"Will, this is entirely inappropriate." He caught Will's hands.

"Is it? Is this inappropriate?" Will yanked his hands away and Hannibal let him, allowing Will to tug off his suit jacket. "Was it inappropriate when you suggested tying me to your dining room table would be therapeutic?" He tossed the suit jacket on the counter, and began to undue the buttons of Hannibal's vest and shirt, who stood rigid before him. "Or was it only inappropriate when you started fucking your patient?"

Will saw the hard line of Hannibal's jaw clench in the mirror, and pressed on. "Was it inappropriate when you encouraged me to cut and pinch myself so long as it was under your direction?" He peeled his clothes back over his shoulders. "I told you not to let me touch you--"

The words caught in his throat. Hannibal's shoulder was bare of any marks. No teeth. No hickey Will remember sucking vividly into his skin. The shock of it felt like a slap.

"I have rebuked all advances since you told me to," Hannibal said, an edge to the words. "Is this an advance, Will? I'm afraid I must say no."

Will rested his forehead on Hannibal's back, hands falling from the wrinkled shirt. He felt himself shatter a little more inside. "God," he breathed. "I thought I -- last night. And here I am now." He kissed Hannibal's skin, just barely, and felt him shudder. "How will I know if you're real unless I mark you?"

Hannibal clicked his tongue. Will gasped in pain, feeling the cuts on his feet for the first time all day. Hannibal straightened and turned, shrugging his shirt back on. "Perhaps I should have disciplined you better," he said, buttoning up his shirt. "This period would be easier if you were totally obedient."

Will smirked a little at the floor. "Doesn't sound like me."

"No." Hannibal put himself back together, deft fingers putting buttons in place, smoothing the rich fabric. "You have reasons to feel that I've taken advantage of you, I won't deny it. However, I don't regret it."

"I thought I..." Will's glasses were slipping down his nose from sweat and he removed them, rubbing his eyes. "I didn't come to your room last night?" he asked, wincing.

"No," Hannibal said, a hard voice to match a stoic figure, redoing his tie. "It seems evident to me that you wish to."

"I'm in no state," Will said, nearly pleading.

"I want to take care of you," Hannibal said, taking up his suit jacket and arranging himself in front of the mirror. Putting himself back together. Putting on the mask.

Will leaned up against the wall. God, Hannibal made him so weak. He wanted Hannibal to pin him to the wall and slap him until he couldn't think. He wanted to be bent over the sink and used, all power taken away from him. He opened his eyes to find Hannibal staring at him through the mirror. God, he was such a mess. "Maybe you should tie me up so I don't wander in," he said sarcastically.

Hannibal held himself very still, but there were little tells: the way his hand clenched, the forced relaxation of his face. He wanted that. Of course he did, they had already established their mutual

interest in tying Will up, it was just -- he needed a safe distance from Hannibal. For Hannibal. God, his plan to break up with Hannibal only worked if he checked himself into a hospital; this proximity was impossible; this torture he was putting Hannibal through worse because of his god damn weakness.

"Breathe, Will," Hannibal said, suddenly close.

I am breathing Will tried to say, except he wasn't, breaths coming in at a sharp staccato every half second, shaking his chest. Was that really his breathing, his body? He was floating in a wash of red, blind, and he snapped his eyes open to see Hannibal hovering in front of him, not touching, breathing loudly to give Will something to latch on to.

"Exhale for three seconds," Hannibal instructed.

Will tried. He did and then sucked a breath in so hard his chest hurt, held onto it. He couldn't -- he needed to breathe and he needed Hannibal to touch him.

"Again," Hannibal said, and Will saw his chest rise, lips part slightly to let out air.

Will forced air out of his lungs but there wasn't enough -- he gasped for air, big gulps -- he had made such a mistake. "Please--" he shuddered out. Shaking against the wall. Hannibal's gaze the only thing keeping him standing.

Hannibal stepped forward and took Will into his arms, holding him tightly against his chest and commanding him to breathe. In. And out. Will shook against strong arms, panic wild in his chest, trying to latch on to Hannibal's instruction. Trying to breathe. Hannibal's hand soothing through his hair. Will couldn't have Hannibal close and try to maintain a boundary he didn't even want. It was all or nothing. He hadn't really committed to breaking up with him, and god he wished he could -- because for some reason Hannibal would stay with him no matter what and he really fucking shouldn't.

"Why--" Will muttered, when his breathing finally evened out. He clenched his fists in Hannibal's jacket, buried in his neck.

"Shhh," Hannibal soothed, holding his head. "Keep breathing. You're doing so good."

Will sobbed, once, all tension and knotted muscles. It felt so good to be held, Hannibal's hand on the back of his neck cool and calming. "I hate this," Will said through clenched teeth.

"Focus on holding on to yourself, and what you need," Hannibal said. "I see that I am distressing you. I want you to not worry about me, Will, can you do that for me?"

Will sank deeper into him, exhausted. "Easier said than done."

Hannibal rubbed his back, cheek pressed into his hair. "Would it be easier if you gave yourself over to me?" Hannibal asked cautiously. "I know you cannot trust yourself, but you trust me. Don't you want to let go; ease into the current?"

"Yes," Will breathed, feeling it tug at his limbs. "Doesn't mean I can."

"Would you like me to make you?" Hannibal asked softly.

Will felt a whine in the back of himself and smothered it down. He could just give up, couldn't he? Let Hannibal take over?

"Let me take it from you." Hannibal's lips against his ear. His hands, so attentive and sure. Will tilted his head to expose his neck. This was such a terrible idea.

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Will stared at his hands. He had imagined them covered in blood, torn skin beneath his fingernails, but the phantom images faded away as his focus returned. He was holding Hannibal's tie in a taut line, both fists on his thighs. Awareness came quickly: he was in the Bentley, Hannibal driving next to him, 12:07 PM. Will focused on the intricate paisley pattern, glad to have something to focus on even if it was just holding the tie.

So, this was his reality now: Hannibal, his centrifugal force, holding his pieces together.

When they parked outside Hannibal's office, Will looked to him for instruction. "Roll up the tie, and bring my suitcase in," Hannibal said smoothly.

Will rolled the silken, vibrant tie until it nearly disappeared in his folded hand. It was so easy to follow instructions. In Hannibal's office, he pointed to where Will should drop the bag, then stood before the desk, beckoning Will with one hand, always making sure Will knew what was expected of him. Will was moving towards him before he could even think, like a puppet. "Put on my tie," Hannibal said quietly, lifting his chin.

Will stared at his neck -- the bruises he had left were mostly hidden by makeup, but this close he could make them out. His mark. Hands trembling, Will unraveled the tie from his hand and lifted up Hannibal's collar. He lay the tie smooth around his neck, measuring out the lengths, and folded one over the other. Tying the fabric the way he knew Hannibal liked, shoulders nearly bunched to his ears from the strain of not clenching the fabric. Will tightened the knot carefully and then smoothed the collar down, buttoned the vest on top of the tie.

"Good, Will," Hannibal crooned, stroking Will's jaw. "You're doing so well. Now sit so we can lunch."

The small praise soothed through him. He was being good for Hannibal. That's all he needed to be.

While Hannibal took patients, Will sat in the waiting room, a spare tie laying across his thighs under the black notebook. It was the same kind that Hannibal took patient notes in, but smaller, a soft black leather cover with heavy cream lined paper, and perforated edges so the pages could be removed. Hannibal and Alana had been taking notes on his observation, and now Will had his own page open, marking lines every ten minutes.

It's 2:10 PM, I'm in Hannibal Lecter's office, my name is Will Graham
It's 2:20 PM, I'm in Hannibal Lecter's office, my name is Will Graham
It's 2:30 PM, I'm in Hannibal Lecter's office, my name is Will Graham and I feel like I'm in detention

It was intensely boring but he was also holding on to his consciousness. That was more a curse than a blessing since his head was killing him. He flipped back through the other pages of the notebook, not really wanting to read what the psychiatrists had written about him, but amusing himself by looking at their handwriting. Hannibal wrote in calligraphy even when he was making notes, his handwriting almost revoltingly perfect. What kind of person even wrote like that anymore? Alana's penmanship was much more reasonable but still appropriate for her, round even letters. Will's handwriting was a fucking mess. He tried to be better about it since so many of his students needed him to translate his scrawl after getting notes on papers. His students. He didn't remember what arrangements had been made for his class -- did he secure a substitute lecturer? Did the academy know he was on sick leave? He would have to ask Hannibal.

Each interval of ten minutes seemed to pass too quickly, but he was diligent and didn't miss a line. The shoes of patients passed by occasionally, always arriving, leaving through the other exit. Will hoped they couldn't see the tie poking out from under the notebook, burning on his thighs like a brand.

Then, the day was over and he was in Hannibal's office, handing over the notebook. Hannibal took it and looked over his page. "Good," Hannibal said, and walked back to his desk. Will followed automatically. "How do you feel?"

"Empty," Will said.

Hannibal sat, looking regal in the leather piped chair, eyes fastening on Will like a hook. "Alright. I need to take some notes, and then we will go home. Sit beside me and hold the tie behind your back."

The tie. Did he leave it in the waiting room? No, it was in his left hand. His hands. He walked around the desk and sat on his knees next to the chair, and held the tie behind his back. Sitting next to Hannibal like a loyal dog. Good Will. Bad Will. Training. Heat crawled up his neck, and he was already so warm. He still had a headache, but he hadn't told Hannibal. "May I speak?" Will asked quietly.

"Yes," Hannibal said as he wrote in one of his notebooks.

"I have a headache," Will said, registering on some level that he sounded like a child. Embarrassment was distant.

Hannibal put down his pen and turned to look down at Will, a line of concern on his brow. "How bad is it, on a scale from one to ten?"

"Uh." Will licked his lips. "Seven. Six."

Hannibal touched his forehead. "Thank you for telling me. Wait here."

He returned a moment later with a pill and a glass of water. Will opened his mouth.

He was sitting on the floor at the head of the dining room table, Hannibal next to him. His knees ached and there was a line of tension between his shoulders from holding the tie. The chair was slightly turned towards him. If he wanted to he could lean forward a few inches and rest his head on Hannibal's thigh. Will sighed, sinking deeper into his prostrate position.

Hannibal turned towards him, holding a fork with the other hand cupped beneath. Will opened his mouth wide. God this was so... intimate, crude, embarrassing. Hannibal's attention was a powerful force, constricting Will's reality to this one moment; he couldn't quite meet his eyes, but could imagine what Hannibal saw, Will kneeling besides him bound by only Hannibal's instruction, waiting for Hannibal to feed him. Every part of the meal in Hannibal's control. Will felt the tines of the fork against his lips and the intense flavor of the meat and accepted the bite, sensations overwhelming him. Chew. Swallow. Breathe. Flesh and red wine and peppercorn. Hannibal's eyes dark and possessive, his every graceful movement one of constrained power. Another bite, Will's head swimming, Hannibal's thumb tracing his lip -- god -- and lifting to his own mouth to suck. Will sank deeper into his hips, mouth hanging open, pleasure pooling in his groan. God, he shouldn't -- why was he --

Will closed his eyes. He felt like he was drunk, like this wasn't real. He felt fingers rubbing his lips and tilted his head back, opening his mouth to the intrusion. Hannibal stroked his tongue and Will groaned, skin hot, headache throbbing. Will gagged as two fingers were pushed to the back of his throat. He closed his mouth and sucked. "Good boy," came a voice from far away. The praise squirmed through him, bypassing his defenses that were so weakened. He was good. Will panted around the fingers, mouth heavy with saliva. More fingers were added, his mouth stretched impossibly wide (wide enough to force the neck of a cello down), a whole hand pressing to the back of his mouth, to the spasming opening of his throat; forcing him open, muscles tearing as it grabbed a handful of the knots inside him and hauled it out --

Hannibal wiped Will's mouth with a cloth.

Fantasy and reality were blurring. That was dangerous, but it felt good, his cock straining against his pants, the carefree power of self-destruction making him float like he was high. Hannibal touched him gently, at his elbow or the small of his back, carting his hand through Will's hair with whispered praise; guiding him as much with his hands as with soft and clear commands. Undress. Put your clothes in the hamper.

The water was cold when Will stepped into the tub, and he shivered, clutching Hannibal's arm as he eased himself inside. "It's cold," Will complained.

"You're feverish again," Hannibal explained. "It will not feel cold in a minute." He sat behind the tub and placed his hands on Will's shoulders, cupping the water and spilling it over again and again. Washing him. Hands cradling his skull, massaging his scalp. Will was still hard and his balls ached in a way that told him he hadn't had release in too long. He frowned, but Hannibal's fingers soon came to his forehead to smooth away the crease.

"Feels good," Will muttered. He didn't know how to ask to get himself off, and chuckled.

"Mmm. What is it?" Hannibal asked, pouring water over the back of Will's head.

"I'm trying to figure out how to ask to get off," he said automatically. Oh. He hadn't even thought about how to respond. Well. "Or," he continued, blushing, "how to ask if you've been... encouraging it or if it's my own crossed wires."

Hannibal scratched from his hair line down the nape of his neck. Will sighed, feeling it like a stroke down his spine. "I haven't been discouraging it," Hannibal admitted. "But it's not my intention to take sexual gratification from you. My needs are set aside to take care of yours."

Will reached down and pressed his palm against his cock, relieving some of the pressure. He grabbed himself, but didn't stroke. He was real. "Not even you can just shut off your emotions," he said, parroting Alana's words.

"Do you believe that?" Hannibal asked, curious.

"What if this is the last time you can touch me this way?" Will asked, tilting his head back on the lip of the tub. "Even if I recover, I might regain my conviction and actually break up with you." Maybe he was goading him.

Hannibal placed his mouth on the top of Will's head, not a kiss, just breathing. "If you never wished to sleep together again I would content myself with memories of you. Whatever little you wish to give me, I will accept."

Will groaned, squeezing his aching erection. He was so hard but he didn't know if he could come. He stroked slow, hissing. "You have to be infallible," he muttered. "You don't shut off your emotions, you put them aside. Aren't controlled by them. Just one element of the arrangement, but, ahh--" He rolled his hips, thrusting up into his fist. "I can provoke you. Haven't I?"

"Yes, my Sweet William." Hannibal pressed their foreheads together, hand caressing his neck. "But don't be afraid. You are safe."

"Fear keeps me sharp. Helps me think." He gasped, twisting his wrists, water sloshing and knees against the side of the tub. He stroked hard and fast, keening in the back of his throat. "I'm not thinking now, just instincts. Fuck, why shouldn't I take what I want, while my hands -- hnn! My hands... are mine."

His mind was white at the edges, hot and cold, not so much aware of his thoughts as feeling them firing off too fast to comprehend. Like worms crawling under skin. He strained his head back, panting, hips stuttering. "Hah -- kiss me," he panted, "if you kiss me I'll--"

Hannibal's mouth was on his, devouring his words, lips soft and tasting like sex and power; and Will was coming, moaning as Hannibal plunged into his mouth, the orgasm so tough he felt it in his nipples; all thoughts expunged; control snapping -- gone.

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The next day passed with fewer interruptions, and Will held on to the relief of the idea that he would have better days among the worse days. He was with Alana, today, at first nervous to not have Hannibal's constant instruction. But it was so nice to see his dogs. He didn't have to think with them, either.

Alana was smiling fondly at him, laughing as he ran the dogs in her back yard. That was the great thing about dogs -- you couldn't help but smile and laugh no matter how you felt, and they didn't care what emotion you displayed besides the basic approval or disapproval. Will always knew how to interact with them.

He wondered if he should tell Alana about Hannibal. With his mind slightly more clear, he knew that what they were doing was, if not outright wrong, definitely dangerous. For both of them, but more so for Will. He didn't have all his mental faculties and he couldn't consent. He didn't want to. It was thrilling to put himself at risk, as if daring the world to confirm his worst nightmares. And there were different rules with Hannibal.

He knew he should tell Alana.

But would she even understand?

He and Alana went to visit Abigail. Will had Alana stop in Baltimore so he could pick up a game of go, and they set it up at the small table in Abigail's room, all three of them playing and learning the rules. Will focused on the round pieces on the board, offering little to the conversation but still enjoying himself.

"So when are we going to go camping?" Abigail asked, bright eyed and eager.

Will glanced at her and thought about cutting off her hair and shoving it down her throat.

Distantly, Will Graham (4:50 PM, Port Haven Facility) answered something along the lines of 'when it gets warmer.' He was going to hold on for the rest of the day, at least until he got to Hannibal's for dinner, when he could fucking give up.

Except.

Will was driving. In his own car. Which meant he was alone. It was night and the highway seemed vaguely familiar but he couldn't place it right away. He pulled off on the side of the road and check his phone. It was dead. Of course it was. Will untied his shoes and checked, but they were empty of razor wire or glass or pins. He pulled his shoes back on and stuffed the laces under the tongue.

He drove until he hit a sign and recognized the highway; he had no idea why he was here, but at least he had a general idea of where he was. He should turn around and head back to Baltimore. There were no other cars on the road but he pressed forward, curious.

The trees broke on the side of the road to reveal a clearing and a dark, domed building. A thread tugged in his mind, urging him to pull over, and he acquiesced. Parked the car. Shut off the lights. Will opened the door and the night folded in around him -- the sound of wind through the trees, the sky filled with stars, and something else itching for attention. He checked his watch -- 9:12 PM. The building was an observatory, and it was very familiar to him even though he was sure he hadn't been here before.

Will grabbed a flashlight from his car and unholstered his gun. He kept the light off for now, though, and took in his surroundings in the starlight. There was something here.

Instead of moving towards the observatory, Will looked to the tree line. He squinted. Among the dense shadows something moved. He set off across dead grass in long strides. The night seemed to rush like water around him, quivering at the edges, a cacophony of vibrating insects that had no place emerging from their larval stages in March. Was there a river near by? Red light flashing rhythmically on the surface. Reeling the line out of the water as *it* emerged --

The feathered stag, glowing in moonlight on the road. Huge, abyssal, feathers shaking like insect wings. Red eyes opened, everywhere, on its head, flanks, between the gaps of its antlers. Will

raised the gun in shaking hands. "See?" Hobbs hissed with the stag's mouth. He squeezed the trigger. One shot, silent but felt reverberating through his arms. The image broke like different planes of glass sliding away, holding reflections of people that he knew but they were wrong -- that wasn't Hobbs, that wasn't Hannah, that wasn't Will, that was not Hannibal.

The night distorted around him. He was looking at the road through the front window of the car, his gun pointed at the figure in the front seat. An undulated figure that he couldn't identify by sight, but he knew deep in his gut that this was his prey. The figure in the driver's seat began to look back and he saw an edge of their face, morphing rapidly from one visage to the next.

"Turn around," Will snapped. "Don't look at me."

The figure paused, then obeyed him. Will felt faint, his eyes started fluttering shut -- he shook his head. *Focus.* He rested the barrel of the gun beneath the headrest, poking the figure in the neck. "Drive."

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Sliding back into place, like a mirror aligning with sight: everything was hot and his eyes stung with sweat. His limbs were numb as he held the gun to the figure's back.

Hannibal opens the door. *Hello*, *Will*, *please come in* his memory supplied as he guided his hostage inside.

"Will, what are you doing here?" Hannibal asked, the calm in his voice belaying the necessity for calm. "I thought you were with Alana."

The figure sat at the head of the table. It was Garret Jacob Hobbs. Will blinked. It was Hannah Reid, face skewed out of place. "I didn't know where else to go," Will stammered. "I'm... Im having a hard time thinking." The fear cracked his voice. He couldn't look at Hannibal, and stood protectively between him and the monster sitting at the table. Nausea churned in his stomach. "I feel like I'm losing my mind," Will gasped. "I don't know what's real."

"It’s 10:27 PM," Hannibal said. "You’re in Baltimore, Maryland. Your name is Will Graham."

"I don’t care who I am," Will whined, tasting sweat on his lip. "Tell me..." He pointed his gun at Hannah. "...if they're real."

Hannibal stepped cautiously forward. "Who do you see, Will?"

"Garret Jacob Hobbs. The Marionette. I don't know, the faces..." He frowned, brain catching up, telling him something was very wrong. "Who do you see?"

Hannibal's answer hit him like a sledgehammer. "I don’t see anyone."

Everything was too close -- the walls of the living room, his own skin, everything pulling tight and trapping him in. Tears welled behind his eyes, and god, that was absolute horror. "She's. Right. THERE." Will gasped, punctuating each word with a thrust of his gun.

"There’s no one there, Will." His voice was too calm. Too fucking calm.

Will shook his head. He glanced at Hannibal, and the sight of him felt like the tug of an anchor, the possibility of bringing him back. Then he looked back at the figure sitting at the head of the table and it was Hannah Reid, clear as day, features all in place, looking quietly at him. "You're lying," Will hissed, lips trembling.

"We're alone," Hannibal said, stepping closer and towards the table so Will could see him. "You came here alone. Do you remember coming here?"

Will looked at him, out of focus. "Please don't lie to me," he pleaded.

"Hannah Reid is still at large. Garret Jacob Hobbs is dead. You killed him."

Will held his head, trying to hold himself together by sheer force of Will. His words were weak, sounding distant, as if they weren't his own. "What's happening to me..."

"You’re having an episode," Hannibal said, close now, reaching out his hand. "I want you to hand me your gun."

"Ive lost my mind," Will said. His hand pushed through the flesh of his face to his skull, warm and gooey, and everything melted out of him. He was pooling on the floor at his feet.

"Sit down Will."

Will was sitting. His gun was gone. His hand was on his face which was intact again, and he rubbed it hard.

"Do you still see her?" Hannibal asked. He was sitting across the table.

Hannah Reid looked between the two of them. "This is fascinating." Her voice was lower than Will expected, rasping. He looked at her. She was still there, solid as everything else, which was only mostly solid, if he focused.

"You're hallucinating, Will," Hannibal said. "You're perfectly safe."

"She's... looking at me." Will licked his lips, still meeting her eyes. He saw nothing in them. "Speaking to me."

"What does she say?" Hannibal asked, looking only at Will.

Hannah crossed her arms with a mild look of annoyance. "I'm right here, guys."

Will took a deep breath. "She says she's right here. Do you really not see her?"

"I want you to listen to what she says," Hannibal said instead of answering the question. "Tell me every word."

Hannah cocked her head, studying Will. He knew her face but a photo could only capture so much. Her skin stretched tight around the bones of her face, and a scar was prominent across her skewed nose. She felt hollow. "How did you find me, Will?"

"I don't remember," Will answered, and then to Hannibal, "She asked how I found her."

Hannibal nodded.

"You should know," Hannah said.

"If you're... in my head, then you tell me." Will's head hurt. No, she wasn't really here, he hadn't found her. Had he? The observatory --

"Will. Focus." Hannibal's voice cut through.

"If you don't remember how to find me," Hannah teased in a lilting voice, "then more pigs are going to die."

"She says... that if I don't remember how I found her then more people... more pigs are going to die."

"That may be true," Hannibal said.

"Why did you use pigs?" Will asked her, leaning forward on his elbows. "Is that a reference to the Chesapeake Ripper? Why me?"

Hannah considered his questions, licking her lips. "You have a shadow following you. I was curious to see another pulling the strings..." Slowly, she turned her head to Hannibal, smiling broadly. "What do you want to do with him?"

"No." Will felt the dread tug at his chest. Her eyes. Predatory. Hungry for blood.

"Will, what is she saying?" Hannibal focused on him, and Will tried to ground himself but the panic was hot in his chest and Hannah was leaning towards Hannibal, hand snaking across the surface of the table.

"You should kill him," she said.

Will shook all over. "She's says I should kill you."

"It's alright, Will." Hannibal smiled softly. "You're safe. Thoughts cannot kill."

"If you know what's good for you," Hannah continued coyly, looking at Hannibal but speaking to Will, "you would kill him. Do you know what's good for you?" She reached for his arm.

"Don't touch him!" Will shouted, and the world tipped.

Hannah stood behind Hannibal's chair, hands on the carved wood, leaning over and smirking at Will, and Hannibal sat like a perfect portrait, and Will put fishing hooks in his/her mouth to make them smile --

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Will Graham seized in his chair, eyes rolled in the back of his head, the stench of piss joining the sweet sweat pouring off him. Hannibal stood and walked around the table, checking his eyes and

taking his pulse. "He's having a mild seizure," Hannibal announced to the room.

Hannah leaned back in her chair, watching them. "Well, that was fun."

Satisfied that Will was not in danger of dying, Hannibal turned to his guest. "Do you want him to kill me?"

Hannah shrugged. "I thought that was what you wanted."

Hannibal stood at Will's side, keeping a hand on his shoulder and rubbing soothing circles that the man couldn't feel. "It's not about what I want," he replied. "What matters is what Will wants."

"You've really fucked him up you know," Hannah said with a jerk of her chin. "That's the problem with pulling strings up here--" She tapped her skull. "--you can't control what happens, not really. Your play thing is falling apart."

Hannibal frowned. Will was not just his play thing. "You break yours too quickly."

"And I know exactly how they will break. You can't control how Will breaks."

Hannibal narrowed his eyes. "You're going to get caught, Hannah."

"I know." She chuckled. "It's cliche, but i'm looking forward to all the attention I'll get in the asylum."

"It's a shame you're retiring early." Hannibal ran his hand through Will's hair.

"I don't want to be on the run for the rest of my life," she said, looking around the room as if bored. "That sounds so tiring. I don't have the means to just flee the country and start over somewhere."

"You're underestimating yourself."

"Are you worried that I might tell them something when I get caught?" she asked the ceiling with an annoyed sigh.

"It's crossed my mind."

"I won't." She smiled at him, looking suddenly like a flirtatious young woman. "What, are you going to kill me?"

Hannibal removed his hand from Will and held his hands behind his back, now giving her his full attention. "If you're retiring, why shouldn't I?"

"Might be nice to have an ally on the inside." She leaned forward, looking suddenly wistful. "Come on, Dr. Lecter. Let me show you my final play. Let me have my fun with the most clever doctors they can throw at me; let me treat my fucking anarexia nerviosa." Her eyes fell to the table and her calloused hands, the bleeding cuticles. "You're having fun, aren't you? I thought we were having fun."

"You're volatile, Hannah," Hannibal said, not unkindly. "If I think you will put my wellbeing at risk, I will take everything from you."

She looked up at him, eyes shining and hollow. "Do you like me, Dr. Lecter?"

He stepped forward and patted her on the head as if she was a child. "I like you very much, Hannah."

She smiled.

Chapter End Notes

cw: psychological horror, unhealthy power dynamics, light dub-con

The Marionette Murderer

Chapter Summary

Will has a conversation with Hannibal, and goes face to face with the Marionette Murderer.

Chapter Notes

sorry for the late update - i'm working on a tight art deadline. I originally intended to include more in this chapter but I need more time to do the next section justice.

"I know you don't feel like it, but I need you to smile."

Hannibal's voice. His orders. Will tried to smile. His eyes were blurred and stinging from sweat and tears.

"It wasn't a stroke." Hannibal came into focus before him, concerned face floating in a haze. "You may have had a seizure. Tell me the last thing you remember."

"I was with Garret Jacob Hobbs," Will said, and then frowned. "No, the Marionette. She sat at your table, and I talked to her."

Hannibal was touching his face, his hand cold. "You have a fever," he said. "You were hallucinating."

"No, no," Will protested. "I saw them. I found her, brought her here."

"Hobbs is a delusion disguising reality. Don't let that let you slip away. You killed Hobbs and the Marionette is still at large."

The world shook around him. "She told me to kill you," he gasped out.

A hand through his hair. "Your mind is telling you to kill the monsters in your mind, like you killed Hobbs. I'm going to bathe you and then take you to the hospital."

"The observatory," Will muttered, the cold water of the bath sloshing around him. "Tell Jack --"

He slipped.

Sunk.

He saw himself reflected in the glass of the large bay window of Hannibal's office, hand against the curtain. A tar black figure stood behind him, antlers reaching to the sky, smoke hissing from its left hoof. Will turned. "Are you the monster in my mind?" he teased, licking his lips.

The wendigo smiled. When the antlers came to envelope Will he opened his arms and took the creature into his embrace, mouth open for a kiss that filled his lungs with ichor.

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Steady beeping. White, sterile light when he opened his eyes. He closed them, willing himself to fall back asleep. It felt like he hadn't slept in months. Fuck being awake.

Consciousness came back with a consistency that he hadn't experienced in days. He squinted at the surroundings. A hospital. Fucking hell.

"Will." Hannibal's voice. His hand on his thigh.

"Will Graham's not here right now," he mumbled. "Please leave a message."

A huff of amusement. "I'm glad you're feeling like yourself."

Will groaned. "Rather be unconscious."

"You've had enough of that."

Will sighed, and finally opened his eyes. There was crust around his tear ducts, and he rubbed it away. "How long?"

"Two days."

"Jesus." Will rubbed his face, and felt the heavy stubble there; he really needed to shave. Finally, he looked over at Hannibal. The man looked tired but put together, wearing a sweater over his shirt and tie, suit jacket hung with the coat by the door. Comfortable. Exhausted. He had been here the whole time. Will had never seen him look sleep deprived before. "What happened?" he asked.

"You had a seizure and have an infection," Hannibal replied. "We don't know the source of the infection or what caused it. How do you feel?"

"Give me ten minutes and a coffee and I'll let you know."

Hannibal got up and left him, taking a bag with him but not his coat or suit jacket. Will took in his surroundings. He was hooked up to an IV and his feet were freshly wrapped. Well. He wondered what the doctors made of his barbed wire wounds. He stretched.

When Hannibal came back in he moved to the small table by the window, pulling a food container from the bag. "That's not coffee," Will pointed out, but he got up and wheeled over the IV drip so he could sit at the table.

"Silkie chicken in a broth," Hannibal explained as the fragrance hit Will and made his mouth water and stomach grumble. "A black boned bird prized in China for its medicinal value since the 7th century. With wolfberries, ginseng, ginger, red dates, and star anise."

"I ask for coffee and he brings me chicken soup," Will said, leaning back in his chair.

Hannibal smirked and sat down opposite him. "You don't need caffeine, you need nourishment."

"Smells delicious." And he was starving. Will picked up a spoon and ate gratefully. "I feel half dead," he said after he had eaten his full. "But the headache is mild and it's clear on the other side. I can think again."

"Good," Hannibal said simply.

"This infection. When I kick it --" He gestured vaguely at himself. "Will everything else..." He trailed off.

Hannibal pursed his lips. "You want a simple explanation so that the doctors can give you a cure. We all want that. But I don't know, Will; perhaps your recent episodes were caused solely by the fever, but you have been symptomatic for months. Fevers can be symptoms of dementia, and dementia can be a symptom of many things happening in your mind or body."

Will rubbed the back of his neck, looking out the window and into the brightness outside. "How long have you and Alana been observing me?"

"Including your hospital stay, five full days. This is the six."

"I'm not entirely sure what I did during that time," he said with a pang of guilt that didn't fade away. It just sat in him like a metal weight between his organs. "What I did to you."

Hannibal crossed his legs and folded his hands in his lap, seemingly unaffected; which Will saw through at once. In fact, it kind of pissed Will off, Hannibal acting like they were FBI profiler and psychiatrist again. "You didn't feel in control of yourself," he observed.

"I thought about hurting you," Will said, annoyed at Hannibal for playing coy.

"You mean physically?" Hannibal asked lightly.

Will bit his tongue. "Yes."

"Do you remember choking me?"

"Yes." Will forced himself to look at Hannibal -- and saw how Hannibal was bracing himself, unsure how Will would react. Will felt the heat of shame rise up his neck as he remembered how easily he had given in to Hannibal. "When I broke up with you. And once more but I'm pretty sure that was a hallucination."

"I see. No, you did not physically harm me besides then. You tried to bite me once, I think."

"You think."

Hannibal's lip curled up in the barest of smirks. "I wasn't sure if you actually would, or if you were merely toying with me."

"Destructive acts are usually more about claiming control," Will said, repeating Hannibal's words from long ago.

"Self-destructive acts," Hannibal clarified.

"With you, isn't that the same thing?"

Silence. The kind that could be cut through with a knife. Maybe even a soup spoon. Will could see Hannibal calculating behind steady, veiled eyes.

"Do you remember taking it back?" Hannibal asked.

"Take what back?"

"Breaking up with me."

Will was pretty sure he had just been punched in the gut. He remembered telling Hannibal to kiss him. He remembered giving into him like a rip tide. And Hannibal *letting* him.

"I didn't think so," Hannibal said, and looked away.

"Then why bring it up?" Will said angrily.

"I want to know where we stand."

Entirely too calm. Will forced himself not to snarl. "I broke up with you. Period. That's where we sand. You know what? No. That's not the end of the sentence." His voice was rising and he didn't care. "I broke up with you and you had the fucking gall to say no. Do you know how messed up that is?"

"More or less dysfunctional than you choking me consciously?" Hannibal asked.

"About as much as you not trying to stop me," he snapped. "And then I told you to turn down my advances because I was out of my fucking mind--"

"I did refuse your advances," Hannibal said darkly.

"Only before I had your dick in my hand," Will sneered. "Only before I begged you while half delirious!"

Hannibal's eyes went dark. "I'm only human, Will," he said in a cold voice. "You wanted comfort and I tried to respect your wishes."

"I couldn't consent, Hannibal. I can't consent! Hence breaking up with you."

Hannibal closed his eyes for a moment, holding his tongue or calculating his next move. Then he relaxed, opening his eyes only to look at the window.

"What?" Will demanded.

"I have nothing to say," Hannibal said.

"Like hell," Will said quietly. "Then why don't you just leave?"

Will felt the sting of rejection as soon as the words left his lips, not sure if it was his own or Hannibal's or both. "Do you want me to leave?" Hannibal asked.

"It's not about what I want. It's choosing between bad and worse circles of hell."

Hannibal thought for a long, quiet moment, and Will let him. He was tired. He didn't want to fight anymore, but there was still so much unresolved tension between them. "I want you to close your eyes and imagine the outcome you want," Hannibal said.

Will glared at him. "Are you my psychiatrist or my lover?"

"Labels blunt who we are. They have never been apt for either of us."

Will was grateful that he had eaten and had some energy, but he didn't want to sort this out. It was too much -- he tried to bury his feelings but there was no room in the graveyard of his mind. He was ashamed for breaking up with Hannibal and failing to commit to the decision; and then angry at Hannibal for taking advantage of the situation and not maintaining boundaries. But he had attacked those boundaries. His fault. Hannibal's fault. Weakness. Codependency. He had no way to gauge their relationship anymore, besides Hannibal, and a part of him would never be able to accept total submission.

Will closed his eyes.

The first thing he wanted was a strong cup of coffee. The way Hannibal made it; Hannibal bringing him coffee in a thermos. Then the doctor would come in and reveal the mysterious illness that explained away Will's insanity, and he could leave, and Hannibal would apologize profusely, and Will would kiss him like he was dying to. Will would find his footing and return to consult for Jack occasionally. He and Hannibal would take Abigail camping.

Will couldn't really imagine it, not like putting a crime scene together. He didn't know how to get there from here.

"Every scenario I can imagine feels worlds away from this one," he said eventually. "No path through the dark briar of my mind."

"You have never lacked for imagination," Hannibal replied, his voice gentle, eyes still averted. "Except perhaps when it comes to your own happiness."

Will stared down at the soup container, his heart a heavy weight in his chest. If he let it drop, he would be torn to ribbons.

"I want coffee," Will said slowly, and it didn't come out sarcastic. "A really good cup of coffee. Like the kind you make. I'm not in the hospital anymore; I'm home in Wolf Trap wearing a robe and you've somehow convinced me to let you install a ridiculous espresso machine in my kitchen just so you can make me coffee exactly how I like it, and exactly as pretentious as you like it, and you hand me the cup of coffee with a kiss on the cheek because that's our routine. That's the outcome I want."

Hannibal stared at him and his hard features weakened into a soft countenance of regret. The creases under his eyes were pronounced, an uncharacteristic stubble across his jaw. Hannibal stood gracefully from his chair, and for an earth-shattering moment Will thought he was going to leave -- realized what he had said and how vulnerable that left him -- and then Hannibal walked the short distance around the table and kneeled at Will's side. Hannibal touched his knee gently. "I would love nothing more than to make you coffee," he said.

Will stroked back Hannibal's bangs. He couldn't remember ever doing that, before. Based on the slight look of shock on Hannibal's face, he hadn't. "Okay," Will said, thumbing the shell of Hannibal's ear. "If we make it to the other side before you look back."

Hannibal caught Will's hand and pressed it to his mouth, not quite kissing. "I'm sorry it has to be this difficult."

Will shrugged. "I'm the one who's difficult."

Hannibal just shook his head, lips pressing softly against his fingers. He stayed there, kneeling, only for Will.

Never lacking for imagination. Will squeezed Hannibal's hand and searched inside himself for a reserve of strength. He could not keep being battered by the waves; his will would break. He thought of the stream, watching the current seams for the place to cast his line; how he was so familiar with his prey that he felt the river like an extension of himself, cool and rhythmic and constant; and he remembered the sticky drops of blood on his face as he emptied his clip into Hobbs. How powerful he had felt.

He was done feeling guilty for that feeling.

"What's happening with the Reid manhunt?" Will asked.

Hannibal looked up at him, puzzled. "You still have a fever. You're not well enough to be worrying about cases."

"I'm not planning on playing Jack's bloodhound," Will said. "But if I'm going to get to that place where you're making me coffee then I have to wrap these two killers before either one comes to kill me. Or you."

Hannibal looked down, rubbing his thumb over Will's fingers. "Then your task is already halfway complete," he said. "They caught Hannah Reid yesterday."

"Really!?" Will nearly shocked out of his seat. Then his face twisted in confusion. "You don't sound too pleased."

"Ms. Reid claims that there are victims still alive in her last display," Hannibal responded, squeezing Will's hand and finally stretching to his feet. "They haven't located the display."

Will's hand clenched in Hannibal's. "Give me your phone."

Hannibal gave him a steady look.

"I want to interview her."

"You're still sick," Hannibal said, shaking his head. "I really can't--"

"I can find them," Will said swiftly. "At least let me talk to Jack."

o o o o o o o o o o

Will remembered hallucinating his capture of Hannah Reid. For some reason he had been drawn to the observatory, and part of his confused brain had expected to find the Marionette there; but when Jack sent agents to the location they found nothing.

Will looked through the reciprocal mirror and into the investigation room where Hannah Reid sat. She wore an orange jumpsuit, her clothes having been confiscated as evidence. The jumpsuit was the smallest size available and extremely baggy in her, her thin but muscular forearms protruding from the cuffed sleeves. Her hair was chopped short, like she had once gotten a men's haircut and had tried to repeat it herself instead of ever returning to a barber. There were two guards stationed in the corners of the room.

"Hard to believe she's physically capable of committing her crimes," Jack said from next to Will.

"She's stronger than she looks," Will said. "And she used the right tools."

Hannah sighed and stared up at the ceiling, picking at her nails absentmindedly.

"Has she provoked the guards at all?" Will asked.

"No," Jack said. "She's been provocative with our interviewers though. Do you want to see the tapes before you go in?"

Will shook his head. "Don't want to see the forest for the trees." He glanced at Hannibal before leaving the observation room and received a small smile of encouragement before Hannibal's attention was pulled back to the Marionette Murderer.

Will knocked on the door. One of the guards unlocked and opened it for him, as he entered the interview room, a cup of coffee in each hand. His glasses were on. He sat down across the table from Hannah Reid, placing his own styrofoam cup on the glassy surface, and reaching across to give her the other, not looking at her. He felt her eyes on him, watching from the corner of his vision as she tracked his movements with the attentiveness and confidence of a predator.

"Thanks," Hannah said, though she didn't touch the cup yet. Her voice was higher than he had imagined during his hallucination. Wires crossed with Hobbs. Otherwise, in his hallucination she had been more still but eerily similar to the person sitting across from him now.

"You're welcome." Will sat back and took a sip of black coffee. "My name is Will Graham. I'm a consultant for the FBI."

She looked over at the mirror, head tilted lazily, seemingly uninterested in him. Looking at herself. "I've read about you. You supposedly catch killers because you can think like them."

"I'm good at putting the evidence together," Will admitted. "I'm a forensic profiler. I use what's left at the crime scene to guess a killer's motivations and what they'll do next."

Hannah looked down at her nails, cleaning underneath them even though they'd already been thoroughly cleaned for evidence. "What did I leave you?" she asked.

Will adjusted his glasses. He felt calm, even powerful. He had something she wanted: comprehension. Understanding. Empathy. "You left me a web of exquisite complexity," Will said, words carefully chosen. "You left me so much information I was dizzy with it. It had been a long time since I had been truly challenged at a crime scene. Reconstructing the mechanics of your kills, every wire, every weight. No one puts that much effort into just killing people. Well," Will correct himself. "Very few killers."

Her eyes flicked to his, grey and without emotion. "Flattery will get you everywhere, Mr. Graham."

Will leaned forward, elbows on the table. "What you do is theater. Art. And art communicates meaning. I felt it humming along each taut line of cable."

Hannah smiled, eyes wide and glazed with the fluorescent light above. She leaned forward, mirroring Will, seemingly eager. Will felt no genuine eagerness from her. "And what does my audience think?" she asked.

Will held her attention like a live wire. "People are largely pathetic and boring, their desires and sexual gratification even more so. The neediness of men disgusts you. Once you figured people out you got bored, so you started manipulating them. You broke your toys, Hannah."

Her smile and attention dropped, and she suddenly looked bored, finally picking up her coffee and cooling it with a breath. "I know what my motivations are. I asked what you thought of my work."

"Am I mistaking the artist for her creation?"

"You're more interested in me than the work, and I'm more interested in the work than myself. Where does that leave us?"

"I don't think it's so easy to disentangle who we are from what we do," Will said. "You are a tangle of manipulation, excessive and distracting."

"I'm certainly not a minimalist." She still hadn't looked back at him, preoccupied with her reflection in the mirror as she drank he coffee. Will could have looked in the mirror to catch her eyes, but didn't.

"You hide yourself in your work. The first displays... you didn't want to be understood, not really. Everyone thought you were a man, until I figured it out."

Her face twitched. She frowned at her coffee cup, picking at the styrofoam edge.

"Did it bother you that we thought you were a man?" Will asked.

"Hmm? Oh, no." She glanced up from the cup and then giggled, shaking her head; a reaction so normal and guileless that Will felt a spasm of fear. *Something here is not like the others*. "Not at all. It's not that. It's convenient when people mistakingly believe that they're more powerful than you. You figured it out, huh? What was so very *womanly* about my kills?"

Will took a deep breath. Her reactions and mannerisms were confusing him, micro-expressions and intonations that vacillated wildly from one performed emotion to the next, that didn't match up with the map he was trying to construct of her thinking. "It wasn't in the method of display," he replied. "But in how you captured Marcus. The fact that he felt safe around you."

She nodded. "Makes sense."

"You have disdain for the assumptions people make about you because you're a woman."

She smiled, crookedly. "I'm pretty free of those assumptions now."

"Freedom is hard won," he observed with a wry smile. He took a drink of coffee and considered her, and how best to steer the conversation. It felt rather like groping in the dark. "Why did you let yourself get captured?" he asked.

Hannah blanched, a seamless reaction that looked genuine and Will filed it away as false. Reactions and demonstrativeness of false emotion perfected over years. "I didn't get caught on purpose."

Will waved his hand. "You took unnecessary risks -- not spreading out your purchases, staying in Baltimore, cruising your typical locations when you knew we were hunting you. I mean..." He paused, as if considering a new possibility. "Unless this is actually compulsive for you."

The mask slipped. She glanced over at the mirror, eyes sharp, a quirk of mirth on her lips. "Yeah, right."

"You are prone to compulsive behavior, though," Will pressed on, voice casual. "Manipulation, lying, excoriation. Eating disorder."

Her eyes came back to him. "Anorexia nervosa," she said with a trace of venom. *She reviles diagnosis.*

Oh.

This was going to be difficult. If Hannah didn't want to be understood and appreciated, then she had no reason to give up the location of her display in time for the living victims to be saved. Will could bargain with her for more comfortable accommodations but he instinctively thought that would be the wrong move. "Have you received treatment before?" Will asked, buying himself time while he thought.

"Ohhhh yes," Hannah said, drawing out the words. "Been in multiple treatment facilities. Never took. Some things you can't wash away."

"Even you can't fully run from yourself."

"Maybe." She tapped her chin. "I've gotten pretty far, though. Maybe we have pieces that are burned into us and can't be removed. There's physics, you know?"

"Weights and levers and the pressure point of skin."

Hannah nodded at the table, smiling. She took a long drink of coffee, holding the cup in both hands, then teasing the edges with her fingernails as she spoke. "That's actually a really interesting problem: skin. What amount of pressure it's going to break under, when you're dealing with a metal cable over a large region." Her eyes flitted around the room as she spoke, pausing on Will to make sure he followed, hands gesticulating erratically and then clutching the coffee cup in turn. "It's endlessly variable. There aren't any numbers on it so it got me wondering if it was possible to make an equation for it, or if there are some things that can't be measured. The ultimate tensile strength of skin is like 3000 PSI. I did a lot of calculations. So when I go to set up a scene, I have a pretty good

idea of how many cranks or weights it's going to take. But sometimes you don't know, so you're just cranking and cranking--" She made the motion with both hands. "--And they're still holding together, all bloated around the lines, even to the point where the line is so deep in fat you can't see it. Bones break, before skin does, sometimes; and then all of a sudden --" She splayed her hands in front of her chest. "Sploosh!"

Will nodded along, squeezing his leg under the table to hold back his nausea; and worse, his greedy fascination. "You're very scientific-minded," he managed to say.

"It's kind of a pity you don't get to see the process," she said with a pout. "The human body is really amazing."

"Is that why you set traps?" Will asked, keeping his voice steady.

"Partially." She took a long drink of coffee. "It's really weird to not see the end result."

"You said you have alive victims in your latest piece. Is that so we can see the process?" Will asked.

Hannah turned her head slowly towards him, eyes blank and assessing. So they had reached this point of the conversation. She knew what his purpose in the interview was. "You think I'm lying about the alive ones?" She lifted one brow.

Will shrugged. "I don't know what reason you have to keep victims alive. We've already established that you got caught more or less on purpose; I think you like the attention this situation provides you." *She said 'the alive ones' which means that some of the victims are already dead.*

"You'll find them either way," she said with a shrug that looked eerily like his own. "Alive or dead. Doesn't matter to me, and I've got no reason to tell you the location." She tossed back the rest of her coffee. The edges were chipped from her nervous picking.

Will took off his glasses. Folded them and placed them in his shirt pocket. He really looked at her, loosening the barriers in his mind that kept others at bay and Will *felt*. He saw cracked lips and sallow skin, sunken and sharp eyes; saw her tying up men in motel rooms and making them scream with a puzzled look on her face; saw the dead anger inside of her that had been utterly extinguished, replaced with disgust and fascination. And also, Will saw deep exhaustion and disappointment. It was closer to hopelessness than sorrow, her disappointment in the world.

"Some of the victims are alive because if you give the location, the team will be more careless trying to save the victims and are more likely to fall in the trap." Will spoke clear and slow, his features soft with the disappointment he felt. "There's a time element; if you don't give the location at a certain point they will die. It's part of the mechanism you built. You told them exactly how it works and gave them the possibility of being saved. But no one saved you, Hannah."

"Nope." She placed her elbows on the table and laced her thin, calloused fingers together, pressing her face into the joints of her hands. She let out a long sigh.

"Where are they, Hannah?" Will asked.

She shifted again, never comfortable enough to sit still, so unlike Hannibal. Will nearly startled himself with the comparison, his mind making connections where there were none. Hannah did have an elegance to her, but it was in the realization of the whole, like walking around a mess of

wire until the perspective was aligned to establish the shape the lines made. Suddenly all the chaos would resolve. Will needed Hannah to click and make sense.

Will felt her -- the twisted madness inside that could be pulled and morphed but never extracted; the weight of filth clinging to the inside of her ribs. For Hannah, there was no 'healing' or 'recovery'; no way to live within the world. The horrific acts she had inflicted on her victims had far surpassed her own trauma or personal suffering, so that Will felt angry on her behalf for anyone who had dared say she was a product of her trauma, angry for anyone else who had been through such abuse. It was fucking insulting to them. Will clenched his jaw. Tried to hold down his anger.

"I would love if you could go there, on your own," she said with a sad smile. "I think you could best the trap. You would appreciate it."

"Tell me, and I'll go," Will said, clenching teeth.

"Hah." She shook her head. "Tell you the location and a whole team of FBI agents will descend."

"If telling us the location will increase the risk of agents falling prey to the traps, then why not give it to us? You either want something, or you're just playing with us."

"I wanted to talk to you."

Will could barely make out the words, her voice weak and indecisive, more like a breath, lilting with the whistle of soft t's. He thought back to his dream like hallucination where he had asked her 'why him?' *You have a shadow following you.*

"Well, now you have me," he said, not even trying to hide his venom. "Got everything you could ever want."

The bite of his words hung tense in the interrogation room, and one of the guards shifted uncomfortably. Hannah tilted her head curiously, still fidgeting with the empty coffee cup. "You're mad."

Will nearly rolled his eyes, anger making his mouth twist in a wrong smile and his head shake back and forth. "No," he said, breathing deep to control his facial ticks. "You are. You killed Marcus."

Will watched her face smooth out, how she settled back in the chair, eyes hard and hooked on his own. "He was so young," Will continued, "He had so many more chances than you and you took them away from him. He wasn't like you, Hannah."

"I've killed many more people than Marcus," Hannah said quietly.

"They don't matter!" Will snapped. "Not to you." *Sitting in the back of her truck, drinking beer laced with poison, laughing. His face haloed by a distant gold street light, beer bottle to his lips -- god, what I could do to him. He doesn't even know. I want to show him, give him a gift.* "Did you bring him into the warehouse while he was still alive?" Will asked. "To see the bound man who he would be used to kill? Or did you spare him that, like you thought you spared him from the rest of his life?"

"You don't know me," she hissed, eyes slits.

"Did it surprise you, how easy it was to act around him?" Will pressed. "You tell yourself you won't miss that camaraderie. You lie to yourself, but you want someone to understand you. Someone who deserves to." He licked his lips, feeling their shared anger start to dissipate. "You lost yourself in the briar."

Her eyes were bloodshot, a deep crease between her brows. She glared at the cup, punching her nails into it, and Will imagined doing the same to his own skin, leaving red welts, dragging a nail across enough times that he bled. "Marcus was a mistake," she eventually said. "It wasn't perfect, but I made him beautiful, so... good enough."

"That mistake brought you to me. Was this conversation everything you hoped it would be?"

She looked up at him, hurt. "I just wanted to meet you."

"Why?"

Hannah glanced at the mirror, biting her lip. Then she leaned forward on the table, as close to him as she could get, and beckoned him closer with a finger. Voice quiet, she whispered, "Besides the fascinating conversation... I wanted to tell you something." Voice even lower, barely speaking. "Can I tell you?"

Will took the recorder from the table and paused it. He leaned forward, until they were only a foot or so away. The intercom crackled, and Will heard Jack's voice warning him, "*Will*." He ignored him, pressing closer. Her eyes were wide and pale. Cracked lips, parting for her tongue.

"You have a friend," she whispered. "I'm good at shadowing. Better than he is."

"*Will, back up and turn on the recording."*

The copycat. "What do you know?" Will whispered back.

The intercom crackled again. "*Get Will out of there.*"

"It's fine, Jack," Will said as he sat back, but the guards were already moving, one to Hannah and one to him. Hannah also leaned back, flicking her empty cup towards Will. Will took it automatically and placed it under his cup, glaring at the guard who looked like he was about to touch his shoulder.

"*Keep your distance*," Jack said, and Will threw the reciprocal mirror a glare.

Hannah was grinning. "Imitation is the greatest form of flattery, right? Good luck, Will." And then she closed her eyes, and wouldn't say anything more.

o o o o o o o o o o

Hannibal had positioned himself on the other side of the reciprocal mirror so that whenever Hannah looked at her own reflection, she would nearly meet his eyes. He knew that she could not see herself in her reflection, her internal image of her body so disfigured from reality; so he stood there instead. Her patron.

But now her eyes were closed, ending the conversation abruptly. Will tried to engage her as he fought to control himself, picking at his fingers under the table. He had absorbed some of her, his expression vacant instead of calm. Unshaven, sweat clinging to his dark curls by his temples, looking as disheveled as Hannah and nearly as feral. Still beautiful. Always.

Will gave up provoking her to speak, and left the interrogation room.

"Shit," Jack said under his breath.

Will had done well, even if ultimately he had failed. Hannah would have played him into thinking she wanted his understanding, and then he would have been lost; but he noticed her contempt for being labeled. It was marvelous to watch Will look into the mind of someone as depraved as Hannah.

"Where is he?" Jack demanded, and indeed, Will had not rejoined them after several minutes. Hannibal followed Jack outside.

Will stood in the hallway just outside the interview room door, staring down at the double stacked coffee cups in his hand. For a moment, Hannibal wondered if Will had gone into the dense fog of his disassociation, and felt a pang of disappointment. Will was going head to head with a killer he had hunted for months, and he must emerge triumphant. Then, Hannibal noticed the way he was tracing the edge of the styrofoam cup, intent on feeling the abused surface. Not gone entirely.

"There you are," Jack said loudly, striding forward and putting himself in Will's space. "Are you going back in there?"

"She's done talking to me," Will said slowly. The words were flat, but different than how he numbly reacted during his episodes. Hannibal kept his distance, and watched.

"You said you could get her to talk," Jack said, wielding blunt force as usual. Still, Will just stared at the cup, not moving. "And then all of a sudden she just stopped talking. What happened, Will? What did she say to you?

"She got and gave what she wanted," Will muttered, almost bored, squinting slightly at the cup.

Jack tensed up, near boiling point already from the strain of the man hunt. "So you're giving up? And look at me when I'm talking to you!"

Hannibal frowned. That was entirely unnecessary. "Jack, perhaps you could give Will--"

Jack turned on his heel, giving Hannibal a warning look. "With all due respect, Dr. Lecter--"

"She gave me a clue," Will interrupted quietly. He finally looked up, making it as far as Jack’s chest, holding the cup out to him. Hannibal regarded him -- Will could not even come close to looking at either of them, nearly sneering, looking nauseous and repulsed. "10251170."

Jack stared down at the cup with fiery confusion. "What in god's name--"

"Written on the cup," Will snapped with disgust. He shook it, and Jack took it, examining the marks left with nails. Hannibal stepped closer to take a look himself.

"She's playing with you," Jack said. "This could just distract our efforts."

"Hannah plays with everything," Will countered, shoving his hands in his pockets. "She wants me to go to the trap alone, but can't engineer that, so she gave me a clue. I could have concealed it from you, figured it out on my own."

"She thinks you'd do that? No," Jack held up his hand. "Never mind. What could these numbers mean?"

"Coordinates, an address, a date." Will backed up and leaned against the wall, agitated, contempt barely held back. Hannah's repulsion towards people, especially men, was a powerful force and it seemed to stick to Will like a sour taste. "I don't know. Give it to the team."

"She thinks you can figure this out," Jack pointed out.

"I need to clear my head before I can think about this."

"Jack." Hannibal stepped forward, placating. All Jack needed was a little nudge. "Will has just come from the hospital. He's done all he can for you."

"No," Jack said, glaring at Hannibal. "That's not acceptable this time, Doctor. Will has gotten more out of her than any of my people in the last 16 hours."

"I'm right here," Will said, rolling his eyes. So much like Hannah, when he brought her to Hannibal's table.

"If you're here then you're here!" Jack bellowed. "You can't have it both ways, either of you. There are lives on the line."

Will made a choking sound, and covered his mouth. "Oh god..." Hannibal saw the corner of a grin beneath his hand. "I'm going to be sick," Will lied.

"You've put Will through enough," Hannibal said coldly as he strode forward, putting a protective arm around Will. He felt him flinch under the touch, his shoulders shaking. "Will you only stop when he's dead?" Hannibal accused.

Jack's jaw worked in fury, eyes dropping for a moment in guilt. "I need Will to stay and talk through his interview."

Will hid his head in Hannibal's shoulder, still shaking. Hannibal put on his most polite face and said, "You have the recording, Jack. Surely you can find another profiler in the Behavioral Analysis Unit."

Hannibal felt Jack glare daggers into his back as he escorted Will away.

When they emerged into the cold afternoon, Will shoved Hannibal away lightly and bent over his knees, clutching his stomach and laughing hysterically. Hannibal stood next to him patiently as Will heaved and laughed, tears coming to his eyes. "Oh god, oh god," he wheezed, before laughing again. "I'm gonna die... lives are--" He snickered. "*Lives are on the line.*" Will dissolved into another fit of laughter.

"Try not to hyperventilate, Will," Hannibal said mildly.

Will gasped for air, wiping his eyes. Mirth bubbled to his lips, volatile and dark. “This isn’t funny, this shouldn’t be funny.”

"Perhaps some levity is needed to survive the absurdity of life."

Will finally looked at him, rising to his feet. Hannibal was smiling fondly. Will swallowed the instinctual repulsion, and felt it ease away. "Can you drive?"

"Yes. Where to?"

"Nowhere. I need to think."

In the car, Will took stock of the messy feelings inside himself, not able to hold down his smile even though he felt sick. Hannibal drove away from traffic.

"Her disappointment with the world is like a film of grease," Will said after a long stretch of quiet. "I feel stained."

"Different than those who have marred you before?"

"I'm not dirty. I don't believe that, anymore. Even if Hobbs is still trapped in the glass. The world isn't dead, to me."

"Has Hannah given up on the world, or made a place for herself in it?"

Will shook his head. "She disfigured herself in every conceivable way so that the world could never touch her again. Maybe she was was never human enough for the world."

They drove in silence for so long that Will thought the conversation might be over, though he still mulled over the pieces of Hannah in his mind, arranging them in different ways. He couldn't feel disgusted at what she'd done, even though he pictured in his mind how the men were tortured to death; the kills were just so incredibly impersonal to her. Some of them, those killed in the traps, she hadn't even touched their bodies let alone seen them. He knew that Hannah, and by extension now himself, were desensitized by her kills. Except for Marcus, who he had gotten to know as a ghost in their email correspondence, who was young and troubled. It was hard to reconcile that anger when Will felt nothing for the others.

"Her insanity plea will likely be successful," Hannibal said, breaking the silence.

"Yeah," Will agreed. "Maybe after a decade in the BSHCI she'll actually get some treatment."

"You have compassion for her."

"That usually comes with the empathy."

"Even so."

Will shrugged. "It's less compassion and more... why not?"

"I think Jack and others would argue that she doesn't deserve to live, or at the very least would be a danger if kept alive."

"Maybe I've lost the plot. Maybe my sense of justice and right and wrong isn't as strong as I always hoped it was."

Will pulled up the emails on his phone. There was a full date in the number sequence, so he started there -- October 25th, 2011. Alana called him and he cancelled her call immediately. Hannibal's phone rang, and he pulled over. He somehow he managed to make it sound both reasonable that they had left the hospital to jump right into frying pan and that Jack was the common enemy.

Will's eyes snagged on the word observatory and his heart jack-hammered in his chest. There it was.

> *I guess I got my love of driving from just needing to get away when I lived there. I swear I know the streets of Baltimore like the back of my hand, but there are also some neat spots out in the country. there's an observatory off one of the highways and this park where they keep fairground stuff I think. pretty cool stuff if you're looking for it. ever gone geo-caching?*

"Get on 70," Will said.

"Are you going to call Jack?"

"Fuck Jack."

Hannibal clicked his tongue, and Will laughed.

Hell

Chapter Summary

When Will's thighs trembled violently, like he could no longer hold on for his own life, Hannibal sat up and held Will, grinding inside him. They found each other's mouths, somewhere through the fog, sharing moans and sucking lips. Will took Hannibal's face in both hands, making himself look, really look down at the sweating and damp man whose eyes were blown wide with arousal; a gleam in the expanded pupil that showed Will a fragment of himself. Will, seeing himself in Hannibal; Hannibal, seeing himself in Will.

"Can you -- stop time?" Will panted between slow thrusts. "Like this? Just -- this."

"Yes -- yes -- yes," Hannibal breathed, like he understood, like he felt it too.

o o o o o o o o o o

Will and Hannibal face the Marionette's final show. A road trip, and then, an encore.

Chapter Notes

welcome to hell.

content warnings at the bottom.

next chapter is a last, and then there will be a sequel fic.

i'm @wormsin on tumblr

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was dark by the time they found the warehouse. Hannibal drove up the gravel path, between trailer beds and old state fair signs of rotten plywood. The building was one story but massive, and a ferris wheel stood to the side, the Bentley's lights cutting across a spoke of L-beams. Will texted Jack the lead -- he would call when they had confirmed. Hannibal grabbed two flashlights from his

trunk, and shed his suit jacket and vest before pulling on his coat. Will might have been manic but his focus was razor sharp.

The front door and gate were both padlocked shut. They circled the warehouse, flashlights finding boarded up windows and blocked entrances. Near the back, Will saw light emanating from a high window. This was it. This was the Marionette's show.

They met up in front of the only accessible entrance, a doorframe into darkness, conspicuously lacking a door. "Entrance to hell," Will said. "Last chance to turn back, Hannibal."

His smile was small but Hannibal's eyes were gleaming with excitement. "No turning back," Hannibal agreed.

Armed with just a flashlight and his multi-tool, Will searched for the trap. He saw the trip wire hidden among rubbish on the floor, the container of acid not above the door but likely several paces inside, a line of wire glinting in the dark and disappearing into a plywood castle tower. The light was nowhere near them, but it peaked out between massive shapes further into the warehouse.

"It'll be safest to trip anything we find before the display," Will said a he pointed out the trap to Hannibal. Will jogged away from the door and to one of the unhitched trailer beds nearby, looking under the tarp for something useful. The victims might all be dead by now, or if they weren't, they might be in minutes; but Will wasn't going to risk his and Hannibal's life by rushing. He found a rake and jogged back.

Hannibal looked serene as ever, waiting patiently by the door, and Will realized that Hannibal was just as reckless as Will, if not more so. He had no reason to be so confident in their imperviousness, but if there was a god or cosmic force in this world, Will didn't think they would dare deny Hannibal Lecter, standing straight-backed and steady before the warehouse door.

Reaching into the warehouse with the rake, Will caught the tripwire and pulled. The rake was yanked out of his hands and Will nearly stumbled forward, but Hannibal pulled him back. Acid splashed on the concrete, hissing against the rake and trash, as a line zipped through the air. Then everything was still again.

Will breathed through the adrenaline. He checked the area around the door again, and when he was satisfied that there were no more dangers, he stepped through, Hannibal close on his heel.

They walked slowly through the massive warehouse, a soft glow emanating from somewhere to their left, highlighting the edges of monolithic and indiscernible shapes. They were in the belly of the beast, and it was silent save for the hiss of acid behind them. Will took a deep breath. "FBI!" he shouted, "Anyone in here?"

From somewhere far to their left came a muffled cry. "Don't move!" Will called. He glanced at Hannibal, who nodded.

The beams of their flashlights caught on faded paint, tent poles, packing crates, and hulking metal amusement rides. A plywood cutout clown, painted facades for the ring toss and other games, a heaping red tent like the deflated lungs of a massive beast -- all sentries guarding their descent into the land of the dead. Shapes obscured by tarps and darkness, metal sticking out at odd angles, a kaleidoscope of amorphous forms pierced with moments of clarity: a hand-painted sign for kettle corn, or a giant teacup, or a nest of metal railings. Will took them around the side instead of the path through the center and their way was occasionally blocked. His eyes were aching from the

strain of looking for traps in the dark, the occasional bundle of rope or hanging line stopping him short and making his heart race.

They moved in silence. Carefully. Vigilant. Will saw something move and nearly fell against Hannibal, screaming internally -- but it was just his reflection, distorted in a fun house mirror. He was momentarily arrested by the versions of himself burning in the flashlight glare, and Hannibal darkly behind him; too many versions at odd angles, stretched and squeezed; too many versions caught bloody in his mind, pulled apart by hooks and lines. Hannibal placed his hand on his shoulder, and Will didn't look at him but nodded, and moved forward.

The light got closer, edging around the warehouse's contents, a dead carnival. Keeping to the edge of the building, the display hidden by tall structures, Will saw what was hanging from the ceiling first, illuminated from underneath. He stopped in his tracks, hands shaking.

Hanging from the ceiling was a huge mobile. The roof of a carousal ride was suspended by the beams above, bulbs twinkling over and over again. Below were grotesque shapes hanging in a web of cable, lit underneath -- the tossed head of a horse frozen in time, rearing hoofs, soft limbs, odd bags of flesh mounting the creatures. From this distance his flashlight barely illuminated the display, but he could make out at least four bodies caught in the web, deadly still. A corpse tied to a lion, floating early upside down; one body stretched by each limb so far that the torso sank out of the sockets of the pelvis and shoulders; and, god, the stench of rot. "Careful," Will hissed to Hannibal, scanning the area around them for traps.

It was agonizingly slow. He checked each step, and when he found no traps the paranoia grew stronger. He kept looking back at Hannibal, making sure he was stepping in the exact same path, and saw his eyes scanning their surroundings just as attentively. Sweat stung his eyes and Will wiped his face. And then, between a stack of crates and haunted house facade, they emerged onto the display.

Everything snapped into place.

Will saw it immediately, and understood.

One man was still obviously alive, standing some forty feet from them and holding onto a cable for his life. He was gagged and bound around the middle, naked and trembling. There was a very short length of cord dangling between his hands. He had wrapped it around his wrists to give him as secure a grip as he could, because if he let go, he would be snapped up into the mobile by the cord wrapped around his middle. There were three other spots around the clearing, at cardinal points, where three other men had been alive when Hannah had left the scene. Will saw them hanging above, and the blood they had spilled on the trash-covered ground

The captive looked towards them, the whites of his eyes bulging, and sagged against the cable. He was trembling violently from holding the cable for what must have been days. "Don't let go!" Will called to him. "We're going to get you out of here."

Hannibal was already calling Jack.

For a moment, Will looked at the captive and saw too much -- standing on burning legs while he watched the others collapse from fatigue, the zip of cable loud through his ears as they were hauled up, screaming, the sound of bones breaking and viscera spilling and the stag rearing, the shudder of lines going taut and feathers and a last breath. He needed to get out, he couldn't hold on any longer. The trap -- where was the trap?

Will searched the nest of cables above, identifying at least six bodies, but not able to make anything out in the chaos. Many of the cables trailed to the floor, which was cluttered with trash and debris, completely covered, actually. He scanned the beam of the flashlight on the ground beneath the carousal mobile. There would be something there -- a trip wire, or a snare. He couldn't make out footsteps in the clutter; she had covered her tracks.

"Will," Hannibal said, voice clipped. "Jack already sent a car and the rest of the team is on its way."

"He can't hold on much longer," Will muttered, as the man groaned weakly, blood dried on his wrists where the skin was long rubbed raw. Even from this distance he could see his legs and arms shaking. "The ground is likely trapped. He's trying to stay on the edge of it." Will pointed to another point across the area where the trash had been disturbed, one of the other captives sliding towards the center of the display, trying to gain some slack on the weighted cable before he was snatched up and hanged. Three weights near the center, the fourth still suspended and swaying, attached to the remaining captive's line. "If we get a pole we can feel our way to him safely, help him bear the weight until the team arrives."

Will looked back at Hannibal. There was only a moment, when their eyes met, where he thought Hannibal might try to talk him out of it. *I don't care about the lives you save, I care about your life.* But it wasn't about saving the man's life; Will was still too deep in Hannah's mind to care about him. Will wanted to win.

Hannibal retraced their steps, finding an adjustable tent pole and disconnecting one length from the other. He handed one to Will. It was heavy in his hands, too long, but it would have to do. Will looked up at the display — carousel animals and corpses hanging and spinning ominously, a perverse childhood game. His eyes followed the lines that fell into the littered ground, the concrete almost entirely hidden by the trash swept from all over the warehouse to this one location. Armed with the pole, he felt forward, and took his first step.

They were untrained sherpas feeling their way through the snowcap mountains, only instead of fissures in the ice, they were probing for trip wire, trash instead of snow. His forearms ached from holding the pole, each step exact, Hannibal following in his footsteps. Whenever Will felt something catch on the end of the pole he moved it vigorously, having no idea what kind of lines Hannah had used. Will ignored the man, who was too exhausted to even moan. Probing, stepping, ears strained for the sound of snaring lines or loosening winches.

His pole caught on something, and Will moved it around. He felt a snag, and then heard slithering to his right. His neck snapped to look, feet rooted to the ground — trash flew in the air — the scream of the line whipping through the air, almost too fast to see — there was a crack and Hannibal stumbled forward —

Against every instinct screaming inside Will stayed still, and everything slowed, Hannibal in the corner of his eye nearly tripping but finding his feet; the weight crashing to the ground so heavy Will felt it in his bones. The line continued to zip, and then went taut, vibrating a low hum through the warehouse; and Will wasn't breathing, but Hannibal was still on his feet, eyes wide and mouth parted.

"I'm alright," Hannibal said, and Will realized that no acid had splashed, no weight was crashing down on them, no snare around their feet. Will sucked in a breath, shuddering, turned on his heel to look at Hannibal. They were both alive. Hannibal was wheezing, holding his side. Winded. "The line hit me," he explained hoarsely.

Will just nodded. He looked down at himself. No blood. No lines of razor wire wrapped around his naked flesh. His heart pounded painfully against his ribs. This was real. It was only then that he realized that the pole had been yanked from his hands. Will looked up to see it swinging in the mobile, threatening to slip out from the loop and crash to the ground. “Give me yours,” Will said breathlessly, and Hannibal passed him his pole.

They were close. Will felt for lengths of cable, not shaking vigorously anymore, stepping cautiously. He was on a tight wire, walking through a field of land mines, and nothing else existed in the world. This was it — absolute. Survive or be caught in the spider’s web.

Will finally reached the clearing at the edge of the display where the naked man was holding on for his life. He stepped on the safe ground and dropped the pole, grabbing the cable above the man’s hands as he sobbed into the cloth gag, knees knocking together. Then Hannibal was there on the other side, his hands grasping firmly above and below Will’s, taking the weight from the man. “You can let go, now,” Will said, but the man shook his head, even as he sank to his knees, hands held above his head, tears streaking his filthy face.

In another ten minutes, he succumbed to unconsciousness, hands still locked around the cable. Will and Hannibal looked at each other, holding the weight together, eyes shining in the glow of the old work lights, surrounded by dust and the stench of death, but breathing, breathing. Their hearts had been beating their whole lives to get them to this moment, now. It was over, and they were so alive.

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Will floated, high, indestructible, as the team came to the warehouse and worked their way inside; as the captive was released from his bindings and rushed to the ambulance, and the sandbags were attached to bear the weight. His limbs were light, his mind blissfully empty. Jack watched him and Hannibal suspiciously but Will didn’t care. Soon enough, they were gone, driving back towards Baltimore. Will fell asleep against the window, exhausted. He came to occasionally to see the flicker of street lights and the blur of passing cars. It lulled him back into the darkness.

He let Hannibal help him up to the door with a hand at the small of his back, and when they were inside Will pulled him close. His anchor. His paddle. He found Hannibal’s mouth for a sloppy, exhausted kiss, too worn out for words or thinking, no desperation like the night after Tobias but a deep, steady need. Like a current under the ocean, a product of heat and density.

When they got to bed, there wasn't enough ferocity for either of them to get hard, their bodies wrung out completely; but they kissed and touched and held each other like they had time. Will didn't dream, when he slept.

He woke up in the dark of night, the bed empty next to him. Throwing on a robe, Will padded downstairs, and found Hannibal in the kitchen. He was sitting in the chair in the corner, surveying his domain with an untouched glass of bourbon in his hands. Like he needed something to do. For a moment, Will didn’t want to disturb his reverie, and then Hannibal looked at him and opened his palm.

Will would feel silly sitting on his lap, so he knelt on the floor and rested his head on Hannibal's thigh. Hannibal stroked his hair absently, and continued to sit in silence. Will could feel him thinking, calculating or traveling the passageways of his mind palace, the fingers through his hair mapping the every shape of his skull.

Will closed his eyes. It was nearly over. He needed to find the Copycat, and then it would be spring -- camping in the woods with Abigail, a summer in Mexico, visiting the pyramids of gods and fishing on a little boat in clear turquoise waters. Maybe the salt air would do him good. Maybe he wouldn't always be sick.

"You are magnificent, Will," Hannibal said, his voice deep with sleep and the weight of his thoughts.

Will leaned against the hand in his hair, encouraging, as Hannibal scratched lightly at his scalp. "I want to take Abigail to Minnesota," Will said sleepily. "Go back to the place the Copycat started. There's a connection there, the man on the phone…"

"We can pick her up tomorrow."

Will craned his neck to look up at him. He couldn't tell what Hannibal was thinking or feeling, but whatever it was moved calmly. "You'll come," he said, only half a question.

"Of course."

Will smiled, sighed. Hannibal believed him. Believed in his ability to catch this killer. If the Copycat was following him closely, maybe he could lure him out, make him slip up. The Copycat was waiting for something, wanting something. Will couldn't see it yet — but he would.

Hannibal ran his hand down Will's neck, under the robe which parted over his shoulder. Will turned to him, shifting on his knees, looking to see that there was suddenly a hunger in Hannibal's eyes. Will felt heat began to work through his tired body. Slowly, decisively, Hannibal slid from the chair and guided Will to lie on his back, tugging the belt loose from the robe. It sprawled out on the tile, and Hannibal was over him, taking both of his wrists and pinning them over his head, holding them there firmly as he licked a stripe up Will's neck. Will shuddered, little sparks trailing down his spine. Hannibal mouthed at his ear, pulling the lobe between his teeth. When he released Will's hands, Will knew that Hannibal wanted him to keep them there. He stretched out like a cat against his robe and the hard floor, too tired to do anything but take it.

Hannibal's hands, rough and warm, stroked down his chest, finding his nipples and massaging them steadily until Will felt the heat spread through his chest. He sucked at Will's skin, then breathed over the marks, wet lips soft and smooth. The hollow between the tendons of his neck, his collar, teeth against bone; down his chest to rub wet circles with his tongue, sucking at a nipple while he pinched the other. Will groaned, arching up with each breath, swiftly growing hard, like his sex drive hadn't suffered a serious blow recently.

Hannibal was gentle but relentless, tasting Will like he couldn't get enough, moaning softly against his skin. Will balled his fists and cried out weakly when Hannibal palmed his cock, stroking the slit with his thumb, growling now against his hip bone. Gripping him firmly. Will bit down on a curse, thrusting up into his fist, hot all over, aching, heavy. God. It crawled up his stomach and chest, burning his neck, flushed and needy. Will's eyes fluttered shut, dark lashes against bruised skin. Hannibal took him into his mouth and all the lingering strength and tension left him — panting softly as Hannibal took him deep into his wet, hot mouth.

Hannibal sucked him hard, cheeks hollowed and tongue firm. He pressed down until the back of his throat convulsed and yielded, nose buried in the dark curls at Will's naval. It wasn't meant to last. Hannibal was greedy, his own desire echoing in Will, filling up the spaces where revulsion had once been. Hannibal wasn't giving him time to get lost in thoughts, and it felt too good, so Will let it be good, thrusting his hips up and sliding into the back of Hannibal's throat, feeling Hannibal moan around him. Will came slow, down his whole body, curling his toes, and Hannibal swallowed it down, licking him clean.

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The next morning Hannibal packed a cooler with food for the drive, and Will threw together some clothes and toiletries into a go bag. It was a long drive, about 20 hours, but right now getting away on the open road sounded perfect to Will, and Hannibal didn't object. Will cleaned out his car, going over the seats with a roll of packing tape to pick up stray dog hairs and grime.

"Do you want a vacuum?" Hannibal asked. Will looked over his shoulder to see the man looking at him quizzically.

"This works fine," Will said, wiping his forehead.

Hannibal didn't look convinced.

"We're not going on a road trip in your Bentley," Will said. "If this isn't clean enough for you, you can vacuum it."

"I have no problem with your car or it's cleanliness, I just think there's a better tool for the job. One that's less wasteful."

Will shrugged and went back to what he was doing. He wasn't going to vacuum his car for Hannibal; he didn't know why that was the line but there it was.

They drove to the Port Haven facility. Hannibal was dressed down in slacks, one of his casual button ups and red sweater. Will couldn't help but smile a bit as he looked out of the window, imagining how Hannibal would be on the road trip, a bit of a preview of what their camping trip would be. This was an absurd plan, barely a plan at all. Will had said he wanted to go, and Hannibal was going along with it as if it made sense; or if the world could be damned if it got in the way of what Will wanted.

"Have you thought about what to tell Alana?" Will asked. "She's not going to be very happy that you're taking two of her patients away without her permission." The last word came out bitter.

"I'll handle Alana," Hannibal said, sounding entirely unconcerned. "She may wish to talk to you."

"What's the story then?"

Hannibal glanced at him. "You're in desperate need of a vacation, and Abigail has been itching to get out of the facility. We're taking a long weekend to recuperate from everything that happened."

"So the monitoring is over."

“You’re far more lucid now that the infection has been dealt with.”

“And how are we going to get Abigail out? Hop the walls?”

Hannibal smiled broadly. “We have a surprise for you.”

When they reached Port Haven, Hannibal signed out Abigail Hobbs at the front office. Will frowned at him, confused — was he her doctor now? They walked up the stairs and knocked on Abigail’s door.

She greeted them with a puzzled smile. “I didn’t know you were visiting today.”

“We’re not,” Will said, smiling at her shoulder. “We’re busting you out of here.”

Her face brightened. “Really? Where are we going?”

“Minnesota,” Hannibal answered. “If you’d like to join us.”

“Anywhere is better than here,” she said, though she looked warily between them. “Here, I’ll just take a minute to pack a change of clothes.”

They entered and shut the door behind them. Hannibal strolled to the other side of the room, looking down at the contents of the little table, a few books stacked ontop of the go game. “I’ve told you a bit about the Copycat Killer,” Will said, taking a seat while Abigail pulled some clothes from her dresser. “I want to go back to where he got his start.”

Abigail slowed down a bit as she put her folded clothes in a bag, thinking quickly. “You want me to help. Because of my father.”

“I want you to be there,” Will clarified. “It’s… connected, to me, you, our beginning. I don’t know how, but I think if I see it again I can understand.”

“We won’t make you go back to your fathers house, of course,” Hannibal said, looking up from the table. “But we wanted you to be part of it. The snow is thawing, after all, and we promised to take you on a trip.”

Abigail stared at him for a long moment, smiling faintly. She tucked her hair behind her ear. “Yeah, I guess you did.”

“Would you like to tell Will our little surprise?” Hannibal asked with a smile.

Her pale cheeks flushed, and she looked back at Will. “Oh, well…” She ducked her head, fidgeting at the edge of her shirt. “Um. I made both of you my guardians. You still have to sign something, so if you don’t want to, it’s no big deal; it’s just until I turn 18 anyway so it’s not really like, it’s just.” She shrugged, pink in the face. “A convenient way to get out of here whenever I want.”

Will adjusted his glasses, grinning, not sure how to react. What did one say when they were asked to be the guardian of their pseudo-surrogate-daughter? “I almost gave you a tackle box,” Will said, pinching his nose. “You’re going to get a lot of bad gifts from me.”

Abigail snorted. Hannibal looked pleased with himself.

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The got on I-70 and left Baltimore in the rear view mirror. Hannibal drove the first leg, handling Will's car smoothly, and Abigail tucked her feet up in the backseat and poured over a book. There was a note of tension from her, how she kept looking at Hannibal in the rear view mirror, but Will couldn't blame her — they were going back to the birth of their shared trauma. There were bound to be nerves.

Will kept looking at the cars behind them, trying to determine if anyone was following them.

When Abigail got tired of reading, she asked Will about his dogs, and he spent a while talking to her about each of them and the story behind their rescue. She took his phone and looked up pictures of the different dog breeds (though they were mostly mutts so it was hard to find accurate pictures), admonishing him for not having pictures of them on his phone. Hannibal was very quiet.

"Did you ever have pets, Dr. Lecter?"

"Hannibal is fine, Abigail. And no. I never had them as a child, so I didn't understand the appeal."

"I could see you with a hairless cat."

They stopped outside of Pittsburg to eat lunch, parking at a rest stop. From the cooler, Hannibal brought them sandwiches, salad, and a bottle of juice, laying out utensils and cloth napkins on the bench. Abigail and Will exchanged looks, but neither teased Hannibal, who had been silent for most of the drive. He should have looked entirely out of his element, serving fancy sandwiches and wiping his mouth with a cloth napkin at a bench on the edge of the interstate, but it was Hannibal, and he had a way of always looking like he belonged.

"Thank you," Abigail said. "This is delicious."

"You're very welcome," Hannibal replied. "If you need anything just let us know."

"You didn't pack food for the entire drive," Will said. It wasn't a question, he had seen the size of the cooler.

Hannibal lifted his eyes, appraising Will. It was utterly bizarre to see him hold food in his hands. No one had ever eaten a sandwich so neatly before.

"We're going to have to grab some food on the road. You going to look up all the four star restaurants between here and Minnesota?"

"I'm sure we can find something agreeable for all of us," Hannibal replied, not rising to the bait.

"No drive-through then?" Will asked.

"Will." Hannibal gave him a pained look.

Abigail covered her mouth with her hand, trying to suppress a chuckle.

Will took the next stretch of driving. In less than an hour his eyes were aching and a headache was blooming in his skull. Hannibal's phone rang.

“Hello, Alana,” Hannibal answered. Abigail shifted in the back seat, straightening up. Will couldn’t make out what Alana was saying on the other line. “Yes. They’re both here. Will is driving.”

Hannibal listened, and placed a hand on Will’s thigh. “I assumed that Jack had informed you, if he thought it necessary.

“I’m sure you can appreciate that it was an unusual and time-sensitive situation. Will’s fever had broken and he was feeling much improved.

“I’m sorry you feel that way.”

Will glanced at Hannibal, squeezing his hand. He looked calm, but Will could hear the tone in Alana’s voice. There was no way she was happy with this. Hannibal frowned before speaking again. “I’m afraid I can’t do that. We’re taking a long weekend to recuperate. I’ll return Abigail on Tuesday and then we can discuss everything.

“Away. After everything that has happened, I think you can appreciate that Will needs to get some fresh air.”

This time, Will could make out ‘hospital’, ‘losing time’ and ‘not appropriate’. “If you’d like to talk to Will, we can pull over in a few miles,” Hannibal said, voice tight. “Goodbye, Alana.”

The tension in the car wracked up a few notches. “Alana wants to talk to you,” Hannibal said quietly. “I can drive again.”

“Okay.” Will squeezed his hand and placed it back on the wheel. Hannibal was all stone now, displeased with what Alana had said.

“Is she mad?” Abigail asked quietly.

“With me, yes,” Hannibal answered. “Not with you.”

“Why is she mad?”

Hannibal looked at Will. “She thinks my relationship with Will is inappropriate.”

“It’s okay,” Will muttered to him. He sighed, and glanced at Abigail in the rearview mirror. “I’ve been sick, and Alana is concerned for me,” he told her. “I, uh. Have needed some help, from both of them. But because of my relationship with Hannibal, Alana is concerned for his ability to be objective regarding my mental health.”

Abigail took it all in silently, mulling it over. Will pulled off the interstate. “If I were to trust anyone to be objective, it would be Hannibal,” she said at last.

Will wondered if he should correct her. How much to share. How to model a good relationship for her, when his and Hannibal’s was so far off the books that the usual rules didn’t seem to apply.

“Alana has good intentions,” Hannibal said. “She wants to protect Will, and I did not stop Will from returning to a traumatic case yesterday. Since he hasn't been well, she does have cause for concern."

"Alana can be coddling," Abigail said, then to Will. "It was your decision, right? Or did Jack pressure you into it?"

Will was surprised -- he had never talked to Abigail about Jack before. "It was my decision."

Abigail nodded. "Good enough for me."

Will pulled into a gas station and let Hannibal fill the tank. He wandered to the edge of the lot and called Alana.

"Hi, Will."

"Hey."

“How are you?”

“Better.” He rubbed his face, putting pressure on the bones around his eyes. He needed to take something for the headache. “My head’s clear. I haven’t lost time since I woke up from the hospital.”

“You went straight from the hospital to interview Hannah Reid. Then you went to her crime scene. That doesn’t sound like clear thinking to me, Will.”

“I guessed where the crime scene was, and when I confirmed that it was there I called Jack.”

“You went into the scene before the team got there. She lays traps. And Hannibal let you.”

“I don’t want to have this conversation, Alana. It’s done. We’re both fine. It’s over.”

Alana sighed. “My confidence in you and Hannibal to make sound decisions about your wellbeing is growing thin. You have to understand how this looks from my perspective.”

“Yeah, I know.”

“Then convince me.”

“I don’t have to.”

She was silent. He could practically see her jaw tightening. “Don’t shut me out, Will.”

“I need this, okay? Just… just trust me. I got the infection treated, and if I start to relapse Hannibal will take me straight to a hospital.”

“Will. Just hear me out. I’ve known Hannibal for six years, and never in that time has his behavior caused me concern. But I’m starting to wonder if his actions towards you aren’t too controlling.”

The hairs on the back of his neck stood on end. Quickly, he searched for an excuse. “I rely on some of Hannibal’s control,” he admitted. “But I am in charge of my own actions. I’ll be seeing you.”

He hung up, and for good measure turned off his phone.

Abigail and Hannibal were both standing outside the car, stretching their legs. Will grabbed a bottle of water from the cooler. "I have a headache," he told Hannibal. "Can I take an aspirin, or...?"

"One is fine," he replied. "I don't mind driving."

"You're not driving the whole way."

"I can drive," Abigail offered from the backseat.

Will shrugged. "Sure. I'm going to piss, do you want anything from inside?"

"Reese's?"

"Sure thing." Will went inside and grabbed himself a coffee as well. He slumped in the back seat, and Abigail took the wheel.

For the next few hours they drove in relative silence. Abigail radiated tension, subtle but unmistakable to Will in the way she glanced at Hannibal and fiddled with the radio. After some time, Hannibal turned off the music, and Will felt Abigail's unease like a palpable sweat on his skin. "Driver gets to control the radio," Will said, trying to break the tension.

"It's alright," Abigail said. Nervous.

It was getting dark as they drove through Ohio, past Cleveland and the bottom of Lake Erie. The only thing Hannibal or Abigail said were to confirm directions, and Will was too tired and vaguely tense to prompt conversation, not that that was his strong suit. Hannibal was usually the one that guided conversation, made social interactions easy. None of them had spent this much time together since the first trip back to Minnesota, and they had been driving for over seven hours. Will didn't mind the quiet — none of them did — but this wasn't comfortable.

"Can we stop for a minute?" Will asked somewhere around Toledo.

Abigail pulled off onto the grass before a dead corn field on Devil's Hole Road, looking into the back seat. "This alright? We're a little far from a rest stop."

Will unbuckled his seat belt and opened the car door. "I'm going to take a walk. Whatever you two need to talk about… talk about it." Hannibal gave him a puzzled look but he was already gone, closing the door behind him and setting out along the empty field next to the corn. The setting sun bruised the sky with purple and pink, seeming to stretch forever above the flat lands. It was too early for anything to be planted, and the stripped stalks of corn stuck out from the earth like bones.

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Abigail stared at the steering wheel, solid in the way that her mind was not. Without Will in the car, everything felt unbalanced, her instincts kicking into gear as the man next to her stared ahead out the windshield as still as he had been the past three hours. She hadn't even realized that she needed to talk to Hannibal until Will had pointed it out.

"He has a way of doing that," Hannibal said, to break the silence, not looking at her.

She licked her lips, and flipped up the visor now that the sun was no longer glaring in her eyes, just for something to do. "He doesn't know, does he?" she asked.

"About Nicholas Boyle, or your role in your father's murders? No. Will doesn't know."

Abigail shuddered. “I’m afraid to tell him. I don’t think he’ll be as… accepting as you. I don’t really know why you’re protecting me.”

Even though Hannibal didn’t look at her, Abigail could tell he was considering her. “Will cares for you very much, as do I. When you chose to tell him, he will understand.”

Abigail bit her lip. “If I chose the right moment.”

Hannibal looked out the window at the dark shape pacing down the field. “Is there something else you wish to ask me, Abigail?”

As always, Abigail knew that she had to chose her words carefully with him. Hannibal’s acceptance had loosened a tether restraining her, but that acceptance was dangerous. Hannibal was dangerous. “Do you love him?” she asked.

Hannibal looked back at her, eyes nearly red in the light of the setting sun. “I do.”

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Will gave them a good fifteen minutes before returning to the car. He knocked on the driver door. “I can take over,” he said.

“Sure.” Abigail hopped in the back.

Will adjusted the seat and started the engine. “Let’s find a place to eat soon,” he announced, then to Hannibal. “Do you think you can handle a diner?”

“I’m sure I’ll make do, if that’s what you and Abigail want,” Hannibal said, not enthusiastically.

“That sound good?” Will asked the back seat.

"Yeah. I would kill for a milkshake."

"How far do you want to go tonight?" Will asked Hannibal as he drove down the two lane road.

"There's no reason to strain ourselves. I will find a suitable hotel near Chicago. We'll get up early tomorrow and be there before sundown.”

The next stretch of drive was less tense. Will found a classical music station and Hannibal seemed to relax into it, whatever was occupying his mind eased away by the complexity of the music. Abigail looked for a place to eat on Will’s phone, her apprehension not entirely gone, but she was more chipper. Will didn’t need to know what they had talked about. He was too preoccupied with holding onto this moment, right now, than to concern himself with all of the missing pieces of their triangle.

They found a brightly lit diner in a smaller town along I-90, complete with an old coca-cola sign and architecture that made it look like a stretched bus. Hannibal looked faintly apprehensive as he got out of the car, smoothing the hem of his sweater, steeling himself. “Are you sure you don’t want to wait in the car?” Will teased when he climbed out.

Hannibal sighed, but there was a mischievous glint in his eyes, his tongue working in his mouth like he might click at him in revenge. “Really Will, if you’re going to be like this the entire meal, I might.”

Will rolled his eyes, smiling amicably. “Think of it as easing in to the camping. Believe it or not this is what most Americans eat. I learned all the different kinds of forks, so you can learn how the other side lives.”

The inside was decorated with a plethora of old signs: the Shell gas station logo, vintage soda advertisements, Diamond tires, and Kodak film. An old woman lead them to a booth in the corner, placing three massive menus on the speckled round tabletop. Hannibal was quiet again while Will and Abigail chatted, taking in his surroundings without curiosity. Abigail ordered a chocolate milkshake, Will a coffee, and Hannibal politely asked for water without ice.

Hannibal looked like something out of Fargo, a mafia man in a cola-red sweater waiting to meet someone for a deal that would go wrong. He didn’t even touch his menu.

“Know what you’re going to get?” Will asked, not teasing this time.

Hannibal had a distant look on his face. “I grew up in an orphanage. I know how the other side lives.”

Will was dumbstruck. Abigail froze in her seat, eyes wide, glancing between them. “I’m sorry,” Will muttered, rubbing his face. “I just—" What? Wanted to feel normal? Wanted Hannibal to seem more human? His mind snagged at floating pieces, pulling them together faster than he wanted — the extravagance, the particularities, the reverence with which he treated food, that severe control.

The mood soured instantly.

Hannibal seemed to come back to himself, and remember who his companions were. “No, I apologize,” he said. “You didn’t know, and that was inappropriate of me.”

Will smiled apologetically at the table, suddenly feeling claustrophobic. “You never told me,” he said slowly, not quite an accusation; and the knowledge of how little he knew about Hannibal, as well as he felt he knew him, stung deeply.

“I don’t talk about it,” Hannibal said.

“Thanks for telling us,” Abigail said, clear blue eyes looking at Hannibal, unsure but smiling.

Abigail and Will got burgers and fries, and Hannibal ordered a spinach pie, apparently not trusting any of the meat on the menu. Hannibal became more animated after they ordered, talking with Abigail and Will. Will was glad he had his glasses and the food to hide behind.

They drove another few hours and reached the hotel before 11:00 PM. Hannibal had booked them two rooms, across the hall from each other. They both wished Abigail a good night.

In the hotel room, Will kicked off his shoes and lay on the large bed while Hannibal changed and brushed his teeth. Will didn’t move to get ready himself, staring at the ceiling and letting his muscles relax into the soft mattress. It had been a long day of driving and plenty of time for his

mind to settle, but he hadn't been thinking closely; he looked at his thoughts with soft eyes, feeling the shape of them but not yet ready to pick them apart. He was living on instinct, trying to appreciate this time with Hannibal and Abigail because he didn't know how much longer he would have it. Everything was still so fragile and temporary and new.

Hannibal sat on the edge of the bed near Will, resting a hand on his thigh and stroking gently with his thumb. "I'm going to shower, would you like to join me?"

"Why didn't you tell me about the orphanage?"

Hannibal's hand stilled. Like Will knew it would. "I didn't plan on ever telling you," he said.

"Why? Then why did you?" His voice sounded thin.

"The past is distant, Will. So far away it doesn't touch me anymore. It was another life."

"I feel like I don't know you," Will said around the knot in his throat. "Like I never spent time getting to know you in the way you know me."

Hannibal leaned over him, brushing his hair from his eyes, and Will glanced away. "You never talk about your parents, Will. Do these things truly mater so much?"

"My childhood wasn't traumatic."

Hannibal sighed, and kissed him on the forehead. "You do know me, Will. There is time for you to learn everything. Come, let's bathe."

Will stood up and began shedding his clothes. "I feel like a neglectful boyfriend. Partner."

"I don't feel neglected," Hannibal replied, removing his robe and hanging it on the back of the bathroom door. Will glanced at his naked body, lightly furred and glowing in the brightly lit bathroom, as he turned on the shower and felt the temperature of the water. A large bruise wrapped around his side from where the cable had struck him. Will kicked off the rest of his clothes and strode forward, wrapping his arms around Hannibal's waist and resting his head on his shoulder. He felt so warm and solid. Hannibal leaned back into the embrace, resting a hand on Will's arm. Steam rose from the shower.

"I'm not letting go of you either," Will said into his skin.

"Mmm." Hannibal squeezed his forearm. "Good. Shut the door."

Will ignored him for a moment, running both of his hands up Hannibal's chest, feeling the hard muscles and warm skin. His palms swept over his nipples, firmly, and down the bumps of his ribs, as he sucked a mark on Hannibal's shoulder. He knew Hannibal's body, the subtle tells of his pleasure, and saw it in the roll of his neck and shoulders.

Will released him to shut the bathroom door, and Hannibal stepped in the shower. Will followed the sight of water pouring down his skin in steady rivulets. Will stepped in behind Hannibal, and ran his fingers up his back and across his shoulders. Hannibal turned to face him, pulling their bodies together, the spray hitting their sides. "Tell me again," he whispered, touching slick skin.

"I'm not letting you go," Will repeated. He pressed Hannibal against the tile wall, grinding up against him and kissing him open-mouthed. Water sloshed between them, gathering between their

bodies until they parted enough for it to slap to the ground, making everything wet and smooth and warm. Everything felt clean, contained, and Will stroked Hannibal's tongue with his own, head filling with heat and static. In no time at all they were both moaning into each other's mouths, rubbing against each other.

Hannibal's fingers slipped between Will's ass and stroked him down over his balls and back up to his tailbone, making his cock twitch and shoulders clench up. "Yes," Will panted against his mouth, grabbing Hannibal's cock. "Touch me. I need you inside me."

"Will," Hannibal pleaded, stroking over his hole.

Will kissed him hard, pushing his tongue in deep, almost battling with Hannibal's mouth. He squeezed the head of Hannibal's cock, stroking down to pull back the foreskin, tracing the shape he knew so well by now. It was almost too much, his need, rearing suddenly out of the mire of illness and fatigue. He wanted to take Hannibal so deep he could feel all of their bones, strip away everything and grab his heart, feel it beat; wanted to be inside him, impossibly, devour him, rend him to pieces.

Hannibal played with his rim, dipping in shallowly and Will felt it through the muscles of his abdomen and lower back, a warm pressure. "You have me," Hannibal murmured, words nearly lost in the shower and between their lips. "Always, Will." Will groaned deep, grinding against Hannibal then thrusting back on his finger.

They emerged from the bathroom without even touching the soap, dripping wet and clinging to each other. Will pushed Hannibal back on the bed, watching the way his stomach clenched and cock slapped against his skin. "Did you pack lube?" Will panted.

"Yes. The front pocket."

Will stumbled over to his suitcase, his own hard length swaying between his legs. He tore open the zipper and rummaged inside until he felt a small bottle. Coming back to the bed, Hannibal looked as desperate as him, gripping his cock firmly and devouring Will with his eyes. Will climbed on top of him, sliding over his thighs until their erections bobbed against each other.

"Will," Hannibal pleaded again, grabbing his thighs as Will poured lube in his palm.

"Let me do it," Will breathed, reaching behind himself and sliding two fingers against his entrance, working himself open urgently. Hannibal stroked Will's cock, face flushed and heavy around his mouth and eyes. Will put a hand on his chest and leaned on it, hissing between clenched teeth. He was impatient, forcing himself open, the water from his hair dripping down on Hannibal. For a minute he rocked like that, between Hannibal's hand and his own, the edges of himself blurring with pleasure and need. No strings, no shards in the dark; just his body, and Hannibal's, so close but not close enough.

Will poured more lube in his palm and coated Hannibal with it, and — god — the weight of him in his hands, the hitch in Hannibal's breath when Will thumbed around the underside of his head. "I need you," Will gritted out, kneeling on the bed and shifting forward.

One hand on his ass and the other at his waist, Hannibal held him firmly, letting out a breathy moan. "Yes, Will — and I you."

“Fuck,” Will cursed, rubbing Hannibal’s cock against his hole until it caught on the rim; pushing down, open; all the air sucked out of him as he sank down.

Hannibal was still beneath him, mouth open in an 'o' of silent pleasure as Will slid tightly down on him. For a moment both of them forgot to breathe, snared in the moment. Will gasped for air and groaned out, forcing his ass down so quickly it burned and they both shook with it. Hannibal's chest rose with a hard breath and then he thrust up, his cock rubbing deep against the smooth walls inside, making Will's head spin.

He braced his hands on Hannibal's chest, just rolling his hips back and forth at first, feeling the shape of his cock molding him. Will lifted up and sank back down, setting his own pace as Hannibal took him in hand again, stroking surely. Will knew he had ridden on top before but this felt different -- like he was taking what he needed and using Hannibal just as much as he wanted to be used by him. Hannibal planted his feet on the mattress and met Will thrust for thrust, fucking him hard so Will fucked down on him back. He wanted for it to burn, to hurt a bit; wanted to make Hannibal snap and lose his mind like he had broken Will down so many times; wanted to force him to come. Will clenched his ass and Hannibal winced, everything too tight.

"Nn, god, Hannibal." Will was sweating, face contorted with exertion and pleasure. The sound of skin slapping skin filled the room along with Will's shameless grunts and Hannibal's hard breathing. Will arched back and placed his hands on Hannibal's knees, rising up and bracing himself, and let Hannibal fuck up into him, his own eyes half hidden by wet curls but eyeing the undulation of the man beneath him, hard muscles glistening, chest hair dark and wet. Fucking gorgeous, Will thought unbidden before his mind was emptied out by another hard thrust. He couldn't even discern the sensations on his cock as Hannibal played him expertly, fingers and grip and stroke. It was too much, always, forever.

When Will's thighs trembled violently, like he could no longer hold on for his own life, and Hannibal sat up and held Will, grinding inside him. They found each other's mouths, somewhere through the fog, sharing moans and sucking lips. Will took Hannibal's face in both hands, making himself look, really look down at the sweating and damp man whose eyes were blown wide with arousal; a gleam in the expanded pupil that showed Will a fragment of himself. Will, seeing himself in Hannibal; Hannibal, seeing himself in Will.

"Can you -- stop time?" Will panted between slow thrusts. "Like this? Just -- this."

"Yes -- yes -- yes," Hannibal breathed, like he understood, like he felt it too.

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Will's dreams were heavy with nightmares.

He had an eidetic memory but it was hard, after, to put all the pieces in place. His mind was overflowing with the pressure and fire of his experience, the ground-level of the boneyard of his mind rising as he buried what he couldn't look at directly in shallow graves. Like the sun, caught instead in the fluttering of butterflies on a polished black stone, in flowers blooming from dead earth.

It was easy afterwards to see the elegance of the design laid out like the pieces for a fishing lure on his table. Hard to imagine how he could force his eyes open again, and again, and be so blind.

Everything was too sharp and bright, hyperaware: while filling the tank at a gas station, Abigail looked off into the distance with her arms wrapped around herself, red silk scarf fluttering in the breeze. "Minnesota is so flat," she complained, like she needed something to say.

"Blame the glaciers," Will responded, eyes half on her and half on the numbers ticking up as the tank filled.

"It's why we have so many lakes."

"Land of 10,000 of them. According to license plates." He smiled, topping off the tank and paying with a card.

Abigail's hair floated in the breeze, and there was something sad in her voice. "Glaciers ripped up the Minnesota when they retreated into Canada, exposed the irregularities in the earth, filled them up with water." It sounded like something she had learned from her father, but said with the poetics that was entirely Hannibal.

Will came to sit on the trunk of the car near where she stood, looking at the flatlands before them. "Exposing irregularities is good. Can be good," he clarified. "Occasionally not."

"Good as long as you fill them up with something. Least that's what we did in the Hobbs Family." She was calm, resigned; reflecting back on a life she now couldn't see as innocent. Will imagined the pock-marked soul of Garett Jacob Hobbs, filling with tar. "Would've been my mom's birthday next week," Abigail continued. "We were gonna climb Eagle Mountain to celebrate. Highest point in Minnesota, but it's not really that high. Less than three hours to summit. You can see Lake Superior from there."

"I'll take you, if you want to go." He didn't know what else to say.

"I think it would just make me sad. Some places are stained now. Some people, too. I know I am."

Will stood up and walked before her, placing his hands on her shoulders. She looked older, no more deer-in-the-headlights eyes. "You're not stained, Abigail," he said.

She met his eyes. A bit of fear, there, of rejection; maybe his own for saying something parental, Will didn't know. "That's what you're supposed to say," she said bitterly. "But I can feel it, under my skin."

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When they pulled up along the gravel path to the hunting cabin, Will felt sharp edges begin to constrict around his lungs, like all the thoughts that had once cut his skin like knives were now awakening, pulled from sheaths and flipped open in eager palms. Hobb’s cabin was familiar to Will like a vision from a past life, one where his instincts found release in the hunting of deer and elk, and love was so precious that he couldn’t bear the relentless stream of time. Abigail, dressed in

hunting camo and a down green vest, stepping on the dead yellow leaves of the forest, looking for their mark.

Hannibal placed his hand on the back of Will's neck as he stared at the two story cabin, the hand familiar and grounding. Will looked to him, and remembered himself in the handsome lines of Hannibal's face, his steady eyes. "Are you ready, Will?" Hannibal asked with a fond smile. Will closed the space between them and kissed his lips, once.

Hannibal received a call and told Abigail and Will that he would meet them inside. She was also looking at the cabin with mounting trepidation, but it was her who first walked forward and pushed open the wooden door.

Most everything remained, covered in dust and freezing cold. Neither of them turned on the space heater. Antlers littered the walls on the first floor, the antler room above promising far more. Abigail held herself as she walked slowly through the room, taking in the familirity that had been so twisted by the nightmare of her father's acts. She touched the large, dark wood table in the center of the room with just a flicker of fondness, and Will could imagine watching her proudly as she skinned a deer just like he taught her.

"How can I help?" Abigail asked him.

"The Copycat started killing because of your father," Will said. "But he's not a typical copycat — he doesn't replicate, but takes inspiration. His motives are different than your father's were, but he got his start, here." Will looked around, taking in the details, looking for something he had missed before. "He's been stalking me," Will added faintly.

Abigail looked at him sharply. "The Copycat?"

"Like a shadow. I'm looking for the source. He… used surrogates, like your father did. Someone who looked like Freddie Lounds, someone who looked like me."

"He didn't want to kill you. Yet." The last word, choked out. Then: "Do you still think the Copycat is Nicholas Boyle?"

"His disappearance is suspicious," Will said. "It must be tied, somehow. If it is Boyle, he's careful." Will finished surveying the ground floor, impressions floating in his head, and he looked up at the ceiling.

They ascended the stairs to the antler room.

Will felt the resounding thud of deja vu. He had every antler memorized, imprinted in his mind and body, vicious tines crowding in on all sides. He felt rather than heard his thoughts, connections snapping into place, lines between the bloody points. His head ached — how long had it been aching? How long had they stood here in their graveyard in silence? Will broke it, tentatively. "The Copycat knew your father well enough to know about this place," Will said, realizing it for the first time.

Well enough to know the Hobbs case, the FBI, the Marionette case, him.

"You felt like you knew my father," Abigail said, cautiously.

Will rubbed his face, trying to ground himself from the snare of erratic thoughts. “I tried to know him. I still try.”

“Even after you killed him.” It wasn’t unkind. She wasn’t unkind, to him, to her father.

“Maybe because I killed him,” Will admitted. “I wanted to understand him. I felt like I had to understand him.” That was what you did with your prey — you knew their movements, understood the life they lived, how they moved under the water, whether to discard them or keep them.

Abigail walked forward, towards the one window, infused with pale light. “Do you ever hunt?” she asked.

“I fish,” Will said. She knew that. She knew — thoughts snagged at him, clawing at his skin, nails of too many hands, mock caresses. He shook his head, almost violently.

“Same thing, isn’t it?” Abigail said, quietly, half turning. Her profile glowed in the dusty light, and she reached out to touch the tip of an antler. “One you stalk… the other you lure.”

Will began to shake. His feet were rooted to the ground. He forced the words calmly from his lips. “Were you more a fisherman or hunter?” He already knew the answer.

“My dad taught me to hunt,” she deflected.

“That’s not what I’m asking,” Will said quickly. God — he didn’t want it to be true. “All those girls your father killed. Did you fish or did you hunt, Abigail?”

She looked at him. Blue eyes, afraid and yearning. Voice painfully vulnerable. “I was the lure.”

Will shut down his reaction, eyes flickering from antler to antler and finding no safety there. His head bobbed, almost nodding. Abigail wasn’t innocent. She hadn’t emerged untainted — and neither had he. Dreams of a future for their strange little family died in the back of his throat. Maybe he always knew, maybe that’s why he could never believe that he could have what he so desperately wanted.

“Does Hannibal know?” Will asked.

Abigail glanced down, eyes wet with unshed tears. “He said he’d protect me. That you would too. That you’d keep it a secret, when I was ready to tell you.”

Will touched her, placing his hands on her shoulders. Like he had when he said that she wasn’t stained. There was a not insignificant part of him that wanted to comfort her and tell her that everything would be alright. He couldn’t look her in the eyes, because then — then — he would see what he had refused to see before. Fear clawed up his chest and throat, its claws digging into his brain. He met her eyes. Saw the fear of rejection, need for love, so familiar, so precious to him. He should have killed her a minute earlier.

Will picked up Abigail Hobbs and impaled her on a rack of antlers.

He watched her gasp, blood and spittle dripping down her chin, the bloody tips of antlers thrusting up through her body. He felt like he had been impaled instead. The world was darkening at the edges, the dim light from the window now sharp against the arching lines of antlers, gleaming like

light on wire, bright as the cut under a sharp blade. Abigail was talking, the vision was gone, or was it, his surrogate daughter speaking to him with bloody lips.

“I think you’re still sick.”

“Jack was right. He knew.” The world was shaking violently around him. “You helped your father kill all those girls.”

“I didn’t help my father kill anyone,” Abigail insisted, standing before him, no blood on the antlers, just a vision, just —

“You *lured* them,” Will said. “You *killed* them. Who else have you killed?”

Will backed away, but there was nowhere to go. “You think I’m the Copycat?” she snapped. “You think I killed Marissa?”

“If you didn’t kill her…” His head was in his hand, fingers sinking through skin. He was melting, opening up. Everything kept at bay cracked open, flooding out of the spaces between the shards.

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In the dark, there was movement. The undulations of muscle under skin. A figure, hauling a rope, one hand over the other. A massive curtain, drawing open.

A steady sound — the rush of a current, the pulse of blood in ears, the chord of massive cables struck.

Will Graham slapped a fish down on the counter of his kitchen, grabbing the tail with one hand and the knife with the other. He gutted the fish with practiced movements, and blood flowed on the wooden surface. Too much blood, spilling over the edges, the smell fresh and tangy in the air.

Abigail stroked the neck of the deer, feeling no life. Her hand tangled in a head of dark brown hair.

Visions, like shards of a broken mosaic, glinting when the light of his attention turned towards them.

Reality was relegated to the dark underside of his skin, but it was stretched, impossibly far, expanding over an entire forest while Will shrank within himself. He was shrinking, shrinking, disappearing. He grabbed desperately for something, anything, to hold onto. A shard of glass. A reflection in the maze of mirrors.

Nails raked concrete, his cheek pressed into it. The familiar fantasy was vibrating at the edges, slipping from his mind, the monster behind him dripping tar black over him, coating him, hot and sticky. Will clung to the thought before it slipped away, reaching for the understanding at the edges of sleep. Hannibal would be bound against the wall, metal clasp around his neck, zip ties around his wrists. Antlers burst from the ground, a whole forest of them, caging Will inside.

“Tell me what you’re imagining.” Hannibal’s voice emerged from the thicket, distant.

“I’m imagining you,” came his own voice, like a stranger’s. “Being forced to watch as… as I. As I’m violated. You’re restrained by the neck in a cell. It’s like -- I don’t know where the image comes from. There’s a wide metal collar around your neck, bolting you to the wall. Your hands are behind your back in zip ties. You… you can’t get free. You’re not immobile, because you have to struggle when they bring me in. Kicking at the floor, snarling. You look like you could tear them apart with your bare hands, but you can’t do anything.”

The pieces were arranged on his desk, a lock of curly red hair, the curve of a small bone, feathers, wire, and needle nose pliers. Will watched himself work on the lure, fine fishing line wrapped over and over until the knot was pulled. He watched himself take two fishing hooks and push them into his palm.

“You realize quickly that there’s nothing you can do.” Will looked up at Hannibal from the floor, pinned. “So you go very still. You’re conserving your strength. Your fury is palpable. You can see the bruises on me. They haven’t really started to hurt me yet. The point is to show you, so they couldn’t break me, yet. The… the man shoves me to the ground… I’m not -- wearing anything. My hands are bound in front of me, my legs chained so I can’t run. But it’s enough -- it’s enough to struggle. They’re using me to hurt you. You don’t want anyone else to touch what’s yours, to… destroy what’s yours.”

Will saw himself, skin lit by the fire of Hannibal’s study, a painful longing on his face akin to sorrow. He rocked gently back and forth, head tilting back to expose his neck, grip exposing the inflamed head of his cock; then tilting forward and looking down with shame and hurt beneath dark curls, shoulders trembling. In place of Hannibal in the armchair was the monster, freakishly thin and elongated like the stretched corpses in the carousel display; all bones, and tar black skin, antlers gleaming red in the firelight.

“He doesn’t give me much of a chance to fight back,” Will panted, eyes dark and distant as he masturbated. “He smashes my head into the ground.” A jerk of his head. “I try to kick and fight, so he does it again.” Will touched his mouth. “I’m dazed, I can taste blood. He lifts up my hips.” Will scratched down his throat, small lines of red blossoming in the firelight. “There’s hardly any choices left to us. But you -- you say my name. And I look at you.” Will looked at the monster now, hard for it’s abyssal black eyes on his body. “I make sure to keep looking at you, when he -- when -- oh god.” Will’s eyes rolled back with a wave of pleasure, and he bit his lip hard, lifting his hand from himself. He nearly doubled over, clutching his naval protectively.

This fantasy, half memory, shuddered, slipping under his feet like the shifting of tectonic plates. He was lost in the woods, wire at his wrists and feet and neck tugging him forward. Making him walk, from one thought to the other.

Stumbling to Hannibal’s house, barefoot in the snow, blood making his clothes stick to his skin under his coat.

It slipped away.

A body on Hannibal’s dining room table. Not his own. Hannibal — bound by hands, legs around Will’s waist as he fucked him. Will took a long kitchen knife and cut into Hannibal’s thigh deeply, once at an angle, and then again, carving out a wedge of flesh that he popped into his mouth and chewed, chewed, chewed.

A line in his hands, slipping, painting his palms with blood. Will hauled the nest out of the water, breaking the surface like so many antlers bursting through skin. *Breathe in, slowly, in… and*

out. The feathered stag floated out of the water, muzzle dripping with blood. *You have forced me into the recesses of your mind, out of fear. But I am here; I have always been here.* Strong flanks sloshed against the stream as the stag came up the current towards him, slow, seductive. *Let me out, Will. Let me roam free.*

With a trembling hand, Will reached out to the stag, wanting its acceptance. Soft feathers met his skin, the cold snort of the beast's breath. Fathomless eyes, deep enough to swallow Will whole.

Abigail smiled up at him from his side in the river, holding the net. "I was the lure."

Hannibal placed a hand on his shoulder. "Listen to me, Will. Please. I'm here."

Hannah, smiling at Hannibal from the head of the table. "You should kill him."

The snap of wire. Blood on his hands, trying to put pressure on the gash in Abigail's neck, slipping on all the blood; and then, obscenely, sticking his fingers into the wound, watching Abigail's eyes blow wide with pain. Grabbing hold of the meat of her neck, and pulling it out.

Will leaned back against the armchair, and slowly stroked himself with a light touch. "You can see the moment I go away," Will said, voice almost a whine. His lips trembled. "When I give up. When I -- become meat." He sobbed once. "When he comes I wrestle him off me and tear out his throat with my teeth. He dies beneath me. I'm still gone." He could taste it, raw and acidic. The cold concrete against his back, Hannibal inches away but unable to reach him. "I lie there for a long time, while you try to call me back. I'm not coming back. Not who I was before."

Will realized then that he has lost his mind.

"Listen to my voice, Will. Follow it."

He could just give up, couldn't he? Sink to his knees before the stag and let it pierce him through, pinning him against a tree. A meat hook, bursting through his ribs.

"Shh, shh. It's alright. I want this."

Hannibal smiled underneath him, in the cool darkness of his bedroom, eyes soft with sleepy pleasure. Hannibal took his wrists gently, thumbing the raw wounds there, and placed Will's hands on his throat. "You want this," Will agreed, parroting the words back. "Because you are me." He squeezed down.

God, it hurt — so many thoughts, battering around in his skull, pulling at his thin attention. Why wouldn't they let him just sink down on the stag's antlers, fucked open on so many bloody points? He was tired, so tired. His body was moved against his will, like a puppet, forced. He kneeled before the massive mirror, features dripping off his face. Blood bubbled over his lips, and the skin of his chest stretched in delicate points as something pressed out from inside. Thin, black tips grew from his skin, blood pooling slowly around the piercings. They arched out of him, working his wounds open, wider, in preparation.

Will smashed his head against the mirror.

The sound of shattering glass. The forest, sliding in and out of focus as pieces rotated, misaligned, came back together.

The lure was incomplete. He had to finish it. If he finished it, maybe then he would be free. Will settled in the chair, palms slick with blood, and placed his elbows on the table. He picked up strands of dark brown hair in each hand, tying knots over knots beneath the magnifying glass. It was satisfying work, the kind he could lose himself in, just a touch obsessive. He pierced the knotted length of hair with the tip of a needle, and sewed it into the quill of the bright feather.

“Are you coming, Will?” Hannibal asked from somewhere on the porch.

“Just a minute,” Will replied, tying a careful knot with the line. “I want to finish this.” His hands didn’t shake. This was familiar, pressing the line against his palm, making the skin pale and bulge on either side. Piercing the meat of his palm, by his thumb, with the fishing hook, and making a puppet of himself. It felt good.

“Did you hear me, Will?” Hannibal sounded a bit breathless.

“Huh?” Will looked up, but it was dark out now, the door to his porch open. Frowning, Will pushed to his feet, and stepped out into the night. He didn’t see Hannibal, or his car. He wiped his hands on his pants and walked down the porch steps, squinting at the distant tree line, the field illuminated by the moon above. In the silence, his ears strained to make something out, so faint it could have been his imagination. A hurt animal, maybe? With a faint creep of dread up his spine, Will strode forward across the driveway, towards the road.

“Hannibal?” he called into the night, then paused, listening. He thought he could hear hard breathing, a whine. His mind immediately worried for his dogs, and he jogged forward, crossing the road into the woods. Leaves and twigs crunched underfoot as his eyes strained in the dark, trying to pick out what he unconsciously sensed. There it was again — a keening, animal noise of pain. Will followed it through the briar, ignoring his aching feet.

“Will—“ Hannibal’s voice was pained, weak. Almost like he was aroused, almost. Will spun in the dark, but he couldn’t see anything. Will tried to call out, but he didn’t make a sound.

“Please, Will. Come back to me. Listen to my voice. I know you can hear me.”

Where are you? Will screamed in his mind, silent in the forest, heart seized by fear.

“Breathe, Will, breathe. You need to breathe.”

I am he tried to say, but he wasn’t, his ribs were smothering his lungs, piercing them.

“Please stop, *please*. Will, it’s me.”

He ran between trees, crashing through bushes, ignoring the raking scratches on his arms and the shooting pain in his feet. His heart was a hard knot in his throat, choking him. He wanted to scream, wanted to cry out, needed to find Hannibal. His voice was everywhere, so close, yet he didn’t see him.

Will had to stop, hands on his knees and choking for air, sides splitting with pain.

“It’s Hannibal. *Will*. I know you’re there.”

A flutter of awareness, like birds taking flight. Will looked up into the trees.

“Obsidian. Will. *Obsidian*. *Please*.”

He had never heard Hannibal's voice so broken.

Men hung from the trees by their left foot, wrapped in cocoons of barbed wire. Fires cracked at the base of each tree, small and contained. There was a blinding pressure all around him, pressing against his skull, like he was hurtling down a tunnel.

It was the feeling of his eyes clenching shut, as tight as possible.

Because he was waking up, slowly, and he didn't want to see.

See.

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He was in the antler room. It was night, and the room was dark save for light coming up from the floor below, barely enough to work by, antlers casting twisting shadows on the walls. Lines of barbed wire stretched between the antlers, forming an erratic and glinting web. Hannibal sat beneath the window, naked, his hands above his head.

Will started hyperventilating.

Hannibal's hands were pierced through with hooks, between the web of muscle connecting his forefingers and thumbs. There were more hooks, in the curve of his shoulder and neck, the skin beneath his ribs, at his hips, thighs. Fishing line lifted the hooks and the skin with it, stretched into small tents. Barbed wire was wrapped around his arms and torso, blood running freely down the contours of muscle and bone Will knew so well.

Hannibal was still breathing.

"No no no no no," Will heard himself say, high and manic. Tears spilled down his cheeks. He could feel everything, acutely, every small wound Hannibal bore, and he had been feeling it the entire time he had inflicted the pain on his lover.

"Will," Hannibal panted, face weak with pain, too exhausted for the fear that clutched Will. Even now, even fucking now, he was Will's paddle, trying to bring him back to sanity. "Please let me go, Will." Calm. So calm.

The cabin shook around him because Will was shaking his head violently, lungs crushing under the weight of the screams he couldn't release. "I didn't, I didn't —" He was mumbling, but there was a knife in his hands, bloody. "I'm not, I wouldn't." There wasn't a knife wound on Hannibal. "THIS ISN'T ME!" Will screamed.

"You don't have to do this Will." Hannibal was negotiating with him. For his life. Will didn't want to take his life. "It's not too late. I need you to put the knife down — call an ambulance. Can you do that for me, Will? Please, Will?"

Then Will noticed the hair.

Long, dark brown locks, braided and hanging from the barbed wire like charms. And Abigail's scarf, darkly soaked with blood, hanging above Hannibal like a totem on an altar.

His knees hit the floor boards.

"Look at me, Will." The gentle command he knew so well.

Will shook his head. "I can't, I can't, *please*, this isn't —" He choked. Desperate. "Tell me this isn't real." There was blood on the floor, on the antlers. He recognized the arterial spray for what it was.

"Look at me, Will," Hannibal panted. "It doesn't have to end like this."

"Where's Abigail?"

"Put down the knife, please. *Obsidian*, Will, obsidian."

"WHERE'S ABIGAIL!?"

He looked at Hannibal, met his eyes. Saw, for a moment, a faint glint of hope in his amber eyes.

This was real.

Will shifted the grip on the knife in his hands and stabbed his own thigh, dragging the knife down towards his groin.

"Will!"

He stabbed himself again. The knife slipped in his weak hand, and the room tilted as he hit the floor. His blood mingled with Abigail's. Fitting. A family born in blood.

The last thing he saw before the darkness took him was Hannibal, tearing his skin on the hooks as he fought to get free.

Chapter End Notes

cw: graphic depictions of violence, mutilation, psychological horror, non-con fantasies, suicide attempt

The Beholder

Chapter Summary

Will wakes up from the nightmare, only to find a reality much crueler.

Chapter Notes

here it is: the final chapter. thank you so much for reading. so much love to my readers! your kudos and comments give me life <3

there will be a sequel fic, so subscribe to the series if you want to be notified when it arrives. I'll probably take a few weeks off from posting to prepare for the second fic. no, I'm not leaving you here in the pits! (at least not for long.) consider this the end of season one. the second fic will be shorter and different, but still filled with sexy darkness.

sinners: repent :P

When Will emerged from the thick mire of unconsciousness, he was in a hospital bed with his wrists strapped down. Even when he noticed this his mind was calm and unconcerned, and that's how he knew he was on sedatives. A nurse came in and told him about his painkiller regimen, and Will nodded, but there was a blanket over his legs and he didn't know what was going on.

"What's wrong with me?" Will asked, and the nurse flinched in fear and repulsion.

She started to explain the surgery on his left leg to repair arteries and the affects of blood loss, said something about Will being 'lucky', and Will started panicking.

A panic attack while on sedatives meant there was no where to escape from the static and images in his mind. Will stared up at the ceiling with a slightly elevated heart rate and it felt like being buried alive. As soon as the sedatives wore thin Will started hyperventilating and, god, he wished he would fall unconscious from lack of air but the attendants came in and gave him oxygen.

This was worse than any nightmare.

Will remembered everything, but he didn't know what was real. The forest with small fires burning under the base of each tree felt more real than the antler room display, blood and wire by his own hand. Panic came to him in waves, brutal and full bodied, and he was sure that he was dying. He thrashed against his restraints, kicking wildly, and they held him down and gave him another sedative.

Now his legs were strapped down too. The pain in his left leg was dulled, but if he had to be conscious he wanted to feel it. With the restraints and the oxygen mask over his face he was utterly

trapped and exposed. He asked the nurse politely if she could undo his restraints, and when she told him 'no' he had to fight to keep the tears from his eyes.

This could not be real.

Will waited for the walls to bleed and open with wounds, to hear the clack of the stag's hoofs on hospital linoleum; waited for this terrible delusion to announce itself as such.

Instead, it was Alana who came, the sound of her heels and another pair of footsteps behind. She entered the hospital room with a agent who set up a camera on a tripod. Will was being interviewed. The sick dread in his stomach rose like bile. Suspect. Dangerous.

Will looked at Alana's face because he had to know. She had been crying, and was flushed from yelling. She was devastated, heartbroken, and still so determined as she took a seat, not right next to the bed but facing him a few feet away. Distance. Dangerous. The agent turned on the camera and left them. "Hello, Will," she said, voice nearly cracking.

Will only had one priority. His word was muffled by the oxygen mask. "Hannibal."

She closed her eyes, steeling herself for a moment. "What about Hannibal?"

"Is he alive?"

Her eyes widened. Confused and hopeful. "Yes."

Will sank into the cot in relief, closing his eyes. The image was there waiting for him: Hannibal tied up with hooks and barbed wire, naked, the sacrifice on the altar. Not the only sacrifice. "Abigail?" he asked weakly.

Alana didn't answer, and Will opened his eyes to her. Fresh tears were brimming but she kept them in check. "We haven't found her body," Alana said carefully.

Meaning she was dead. Will remembered the arterial spray. There had been too much blood. He remembered impaling Abigail on the antlers but then we he had emerged from the hallucinations she hadn't been in the room, no antler tips slick with blood, just the faint dust of arterial spray, and her hair braided and hanging from the wires. "I don't know what happened," Will told Alana, desperately trying to stay calm. "I lost time, I was hallucinating. I don't know if what I remember was real."

Alana looked away, a muscle popping in her jaw. "You attacked Hannibal. They found Abigail's blood and shorn hair at the scene, blood under your nails."

Will glanced at his hands, nauseated by the knowledge that someone had scraped him while he was unconscious. He wondered if it had been Beverly.

"You're the suspect for Abigail's murder," Alana said.

Will nodded, chest tight, horrified at what he had done. The walls started closing in. He couldn't hold his chest or rub his face to ease the snare of panic closing in -- he was trapped on the cot and the awful realization of what he must have done sunk into his prone body, dragging him down.

"Will?"

Abigail Hobbs, doe-eyed and resilient. Curled up asleep in the back of his car with her hand still in a book. Devastating him and Alana at the game of go. Looking at him with mounting horror, seeing the monster inside him. Dead. Murdered. By his hands.

Alana waited patiently for Will to come back from the pit in his mind. "I never wanted to hurt her," Will said numbly. "I wasn't myself..."

"Do you remember what happened to Abigail?"

Will shook his head. Garett Jacob Hobbs had wanted to kill Abigail, and he was in Will's head -- and Will had imagined killing her, the intrusive thoughts that made him nauseous. This couldn't be real, but impossibly, it was.

"There's something more," Alana said, looking pale. "You're the suspect in five other murders."

For a few agonizing seconds, Will couldn't process what she had just said. "What?" Will hissed, completely thrown.

"They found human remains in the lures at your home," she continued, even though her voice was trembling. "Cassie Boyle, Melissa Scurr, Maxine Higgens, Samuel Gross, and Donald Sutcliffe."

They were the names of the Copycat's victims. Will stared at Alana. Suspect. Serial killer. He thought he had reached the depths of horror, but the bottom opened up under him. "I don't remember killing anyone," he nearly whispered.

She looked like she wanted to believe him. "We have to do some tests. They'll be the standard psychopathology tests. Thematic Apperception. Minnesota Multiphasic."

"I want another brain scan." He was sick -- that was the only explanation.

"I want to believe that you weren't in control of yourself," Alana said. "To believe that you're sick."

"Then believe me," Will pleaded.

She bit her lip and shut her eyes again. "I'll see what I can do about the brain scan."

"Thank you." Will didn't ask her to see what she could do about the restraints. He couldn't trust himself. "Are you going to continue to be my doctor?"

"I hadn't decided yet."

"Is that what this meeting is for?"

"You need help, Will," Alana said, squaring her shoulders and finding his eyes. "Regardless of the source of the dementia."

"You don't think I'm a psychopath."

"I find it hard to believe that an intelligent psychopath would try to kill himself and leave a victim alive."

Will went cold, and thought he might be sick. He hadn't felt suicidal when he drove the knife into his thigh. It wasn't logical. He just had to do it. "If I was in my right mind at that moment, I would

have picked a better way to kill myself," he said. "If I was in my right mind I wouldn't have done any of it. At the very least I would have freed Hannibal--" He choked, and squeezed his eyes shut.

Alana was speaking but Will couldn't focus on it. The panic was swelling again, static and knives against his skin. It had been his fantasy, hadn't it? But reversed, reflected -- Hannibal having to tear and bleed to get through the thicket and reach Will, having to suffer and fight for what he wanted; and Will dying just out of his reach, wounded before him and unable to be saved. He could imagine it vividly: Hannibal's skin tearing out of the hooks, blood spilling thickly down his arms as he struggled to free himself from the tangle of barbed wire, losing his own blood rapidly as he tied a poor tourniquet over Will's thigh to give himself time to get to a phone.

"What did I do to Hannibal?" Will asked, voice broken now. "I remember hooks and barbed wire, but it all feels like a dream."

Alana was pale and horrified. She opened her mouth, then closed it. She had no fucking idea what to do.

"What am I being charged with?" Will asked when she couldn't answer. "Please, Alana, I have to know."

She made herself meet his eye, and Will realized that she believed she had failed him, failed all of them -- him, Abigail, and Hannibal. "You tortured him," she said, and tears spilled down her face.

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Hannibal stepped up the drive to the two-story hunting cabin, gravel beneath his shoes. The winter woods bereft of leaves swayed in the wind, surrounding the cabin on all sides, reminding him of the primal forest from which he first learned hunger. This moment, too, felt mythic. Hannibal slid his phone back into his pocket, heavy with the call from Alana: a warning about Jack. Suspicion about Abigail, himself, and Will. It was time.

As he walked leisurely back to the cabin, Abigail came bursting out of the front door, her dark hair floating around her pale, frightened face. She ran to him, all but crashing into his arms, and he held her as she stammered, “Something’s wrong with Will, I think he’s having a seizure.” She sobbed dryly, gripping Hannibal’s arms. “It’s my fault — I told him about hunting with my father. He knows. I thought he would hurt me.”

“Abigail,” Hannibal said soothingly. “Look at me.”

She raised her face to him, eyes wide and worried but with a spark of fighting instinct. Hannibal tucked her hair behind an ear, radiating calm. “It’s very important that you do what I say,” he said soothingly. “Remain calm. Go to the trunk and retrieve the black hardshell suitcase for me, then bring it into the cabin.”

Abigail nodded, taking a deep breath, and then went to the car.

Hannibal entered the cabin, taking in the familiar scent of sweat and fever and Will. From his satchel he put on a pair of gloves, and ascended the stairs. Will was standing rigid and trembling in the middle of the antler room, eyes rolled up to the back of his head, hair sticking to his forehead with sweat. Hannibal took his pulse and lifted the lids of his eyes, then sat him down on the dusty floor. He pulled out the light metronome from his satchel and set it before Will, switching it on and watching the light flicker across his sickly features.

"Will. Listen to my voice."

When Abigail came up the stairs with the black suitcase, Hannibal had Will deep in the waters of hypnotism, talking to him quietly. Her eyes brows furrowed at the sight. "What are you doing?" she asked warily.

"Sit in the chair, please," he said to her, gesturing to the metal chair by the tool table. She obeyed, staring at Will's back, his shoulders and dark curls edged with the flickering cool light. Hannibal stood and came over to her, unclasping the suitcase to reveal an assortment of tools, medical and otherwise, and a bundle of clear plastic. "I'm going to draw your blood, Abigail," he explained evenly.

"Why?" she asked.

Hannibal looked up at her with a curious tilt of his head. She was frightened and fascinated, not yet pinned by fear, sussing out the limits of the trap she was in. He didn't answer her, letting her figure it out for herself.

"You're not taking him to a hospital," Abigail said, eyes flickering across Hannibal's blank face, mind working furiously.

"No." Hannibal took out a syringe and a vial, drawing the substance through the needle. He might not need it. Abigail seemed calm enough.

"Will said that the Copycat was someone close to my father and the case. You called him. Why did you call him?"

Hannibal paused what he was doing and addressed her plainly. "I wanted to see what would happen."

Abigail blinked, and watched as Hannibal arranged her arm on the table, elbow up, and prepared the site with antiseptic and tied above it with a rubber band. "Make a fist," he said, and was pleased when she complied. He found the vein easily enough, and slid a needle inside.

"What's going to happen now?" Abigail asked. "Are you going to kill us?"

"No, my dear," Hannibal said, reaching up to stroke her cheek. The gesture confused her, kept her unsettled. Good. "Not unless you give me reason to. Uncle Jack suspects you. You will be caught and prosecuted. So long as the world believes you are alive, I cannot protect you."

"I don't want to die," Abigail said, as Hannibal set up the blood bag, and began to draw from her vein.

"Then do exactly as I say."

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Days passed torturously slow. A miasma of sterile gloves, tests, morphine, and the thick sludge of his thoughts. Will suffered another fever and micro-seizures. Jack came and gave him some of the details that Alana wouldn't, and told him what to expect for his transfer to the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. The FBI wanted the trial done as quietly and quickly as possible, but that was unlikely to happen. No one brought flowers. He was, after all, a suspected serial killer.

The doctors found his encephalitis, the right half of his brain on fire. So he wasn't just going insane. It was a dull comfort, this explanation for his episodes of violence and lost time; but he had murdered Abigail and had nearly killed Hannibal, so what did it matter if he regained his mind? The guilt was going to destroy him either way.

Hannibal didn't come. Of course he didn't. Will didn't expect to see him, but he was the only one Will wanted to talk to; the only one to help him out of this pit of despair or make sense of what he had done. He wanted to see him, needed to see that he was breathing and alive, that Will was not existing in a world without Hannibal Lecter. A world without him would be dull and without beauty.

Will had too much time to think, and when he looked back on the past four months some of the crimes for which he was suspected made horrifying sense. The Copycat had plucked things from his mind like no one could have, reflected his fantasies -- the surrogate of Freddie Lounds, his own doppelgänger, Dr. Suttcliffe getting a taste of his own medicine. But he hadn't been sick when Cassie Boyle was killed, or at least not aware that he was. Everything was thrown into doubt. Will had come to accept his own dark fantasies with Hannibal, but now those desires repulsed him. There was no game, no scene, the violence no longer just in his mind. Ultimately, Will had never been a safe person.

Every time Will had tried to push Hannibal away, he had known subconsciously that he was the monster in the room.

Will had choked Hannibal during his night terror not out of fear for his own life, but because he had wanted to. Because it aroused him.

Will was the Copycat. He was a mirror, and he had turned to face the most grotesque violence humans were capable of, and in doing so retained the image upon himself. And maybe, when the lights were off and nothing could be reflected in the darkness, Will was inherently capable of the kind of violence he had pursued his whole life.

He had looked into the abyss, and in looking back, the abyss had consumed him.

Hannibal had believed in Will, and he had been wrong to.

Will only cried at night, when the hospital was quiet and he could pretend to have a modicum of privacy. The sides of his face grew sticky with tears that he couldn’t wipe away, the skin around his eyes red and stinging.

The day before Will was to be transferred to the BSHCI, Hannibal came. Will recognized the cadence of his footsteps against the hospital floor, and his heart began to race. Hannibal opened the door to Will’s room and stepped inside gracefully, every movement calculated. Hannibal looked like himself — dressed impeccably and supernaturally poised. A somber dark brown suit with no splash of color. His hair had been cut recently, gelled flawlessly to the left, not a strand out of place. But his hands were bandaged, and the slow ease of his movements concealed the stiffness of many healing wounds. His face walled off all expression, unflinching as he met Will’s gaze. But, god, it was him -- and he was alive.

“Hello, Will.”

Will let out a soft sob of relief. “I didn’t think you would come.” He sounded so needy.

Hannibal clasped his hands in front of himself, standing before the bed. He took in the restraints on Will's ankles and wrists before fixing his gaze back on his face. "I was cautioned against visiting you," Hannibal answered in a level voice, his expression absolutely flat.

Will swallowed, something squirming and fluttering in his chest. He made himself breathe evenly. Made himself look back. "I'm so sorry," Will said, giving each word weight and time, sounding utterly inadequate to his own ears. "I never wanted--"

Hannibal held up a hand, and Will fell immediately silent. "I understand. You were not in control of your own actions." Still, he was a blank expanse without feeling or affectation. All walls up. The door to his mind palace closed and locked. Will wished Hannibal had let him apologize instead of cutting him off. Will needed him to undertand. Slowly, Hannibal lowered his hand back to clasp the other, and continued. "I find myself surprised at the voracious violence with which your fantasies broke the skin of reality. You are, it seems, categorically exceptional."

Will blinked back tears and stared at the ceiling. He understood that Hannibal needed to say these things to him, and didn't reply. Really, what could he say? The most he could give was his attention and the desperate regret in his eyes.

Hannibal waited for him to look back before continuing. "I led you astray, Will. When you were sick, I pushed you. When you tried to keep me safe, I pulled you back to me, fostering dependence."

"This is not your fault," Will said, voice harsh with the force of keeping his tears at bay.

Hannibal paused, tasting the words. Considering. "I failed to lead you through that darkness. You asked me to promise not to let you hurt me. I could not."

"I did this. To you." Will's jaw trembled, the pit of despair expanding impossibly within him, aching and hollow. "I can't survive this." Not without you.

Hannibal stared at him quietly. Will saw his pulse flutter once in his neck, the only sign that this was affecting him in any way. He stepped forward, pulling something out of his pocket and placing it on the side table: the dried head of a red carnation, wilted and crumbling beyond recognition. Hannibal regarded it, two fingers lingering on the surface of the table, while Will studied the planes of his face -- perhaps the last time he would ever see him this close. "The answer for how to survive this lies already in your mind," Hannibal said, giving Will one last look. "Only you can find it."

And then he left, leaving Will with the image of his face burned into his retinas -- an image that would haunt him in the months to come. Within those dark amber eyes, Will had not just seen a depth of loss and regret, but a glint of proud satisfaction, just behind the reflection of his own wretched face.

Will had looked, and looked, and looked. Into the depths of human violence. Into Hannibal. Losing himself in the reflections. His brain had caught the fire of the sun, burning through the images until he was blackened, smoke and tar. It was time to turn off the lights; close his eyes and mind to a darkness so absolute nothing could be seen in the mirror; to be only a smooth plane of glass shattered on the floor. Will sunk, sunk, sunk -- into the river on a night with no stars or moon. He was alone. Good. If there was only himself in his mind, he was the only one who could be hurt.

And then, a voice, echoing from the depths:

"I am here with you. Look at me, Will."

[sequel]

first chapter of the sequel is up :) -> Image of the Beloved

Works inspired by this one

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